

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 31 August 2006

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**Mr Speaker (Mr John Aquilina)** took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

**Mr Speaker** offered the Prayer.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation and its elders and thank them for their custodianship of this land.

## HANSARD AVAILABILITY

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the fact that Tuesday's *Hansard* is still not available. We all understand what went on within this precinct on Tuesday. We have great sympathy for those who work within this place, including Hansard and the job they do. I am very grateful that yesterday's *Hansard* is available online but it is an absurdity that Tuesday's *Hansard* is not available and will not be available until the end of this week. It makes it very hard in a system of accountable government to hold government accountable when you do not actually have a record of its words. So, either *Hansard* is important or it is not, and I say, given that this is likely to occur again at some stage over the next six months, that better arrangements have to be put in place to ensure that all members of this House are able to get access to *Hansard* in a timely fashion. This is not about the Hansard reporters; this is about the management of this place. We understand the pressure you are under but clearly this is unacceptable.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I note the comments of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I will discuss the matter with the Clerk and provide an answer later in the sitting.

## CHANNEL 7 FORMER EPPING SITE PROTECTION BILL

**Bill introduced and read a first time.**

### Second Reading

**Mr ANDREW TINK** (Epping) [10.05 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The object of the Channel 7 Former Epping Site Protection Bill is to protect the site at Epping by ensuring that Parramatta City Council remains the consent authority for any application to carry out development on the site, by prohibiting the carrying out of excessive development on the site and by requiring community consultation in relation to the carrying out of development on the site. Part 2 of the bill provides that the council is the consent authority in relation to the carrying out of any development. Part 3 provides that the development of the site is to require the consent of Parramatta council. Part 4 requires that a concept plan for the site be developed by the council. Part 5 requires that community consultation be undertaken by the council in finalising that plan. A decision has already been taken by the Minister for Planning to take over control of this site, and a legal declaration to that effect has been made. In particular, clause 5 of the bill states:

... prevents the making or operation of any declaration under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* that the carrying out of development on the site is a project to which Part 3A of that Act applies or that has the effect of making development on the site a project or part of a project to which Part 3A of that Act applies.

Most crucially:

Any such declaration that has been made—

I understand one has been made—

or is made has no effect to the extent to which it applies to the site.

In part, this bill follows an excellent precedent that was introduced by the honourable member for Lane Cove under which the site was to remain substantially for existing use with existing buildings. However, under this bill the whole site is up for development. This bill is based on the one introduced by the honourable member for Lane Cove but it is essentially a simpler bill. The need for the bill goes back some little time, and the antecedents go back at least to last year. I will read part of a letter dated 16 December 2005 from a constituent, R. N. Burwood, of 6 Marook Street, Carlingford, to the acting director, Department of Planning, in response to a letter he received in his letterbox:

I am writing in regard to your letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2005 covering the above matter—

that is, the site development concept proposal plan for Channel 7, 61 Mobbs Lane, Epping—

It was with some amazement that I should receive a letter from your department about a development on this site as one would think that this should be first processed through Parramatta City Council. This site falls in the Parramatta City Council zone and one would think that the local Council would have a better insight into this area than a centralised department in the city. Parramatta City Council would also know the impact on the local area, which would be made by such a large development on this site.

That interesting letter expresses surprise that the Department of Planning has jumped into this matter from day one. From day one the department has not given a toss about Parramatta council. I expect looking back on this matter now with hindsight the department always had the express intention of taking over this site and leaving Parramatta City Council completely out of the picture. On 7 November last year I wrote a lengthy letter to the Minister for Planning. In that letter, I said that I understood there were rumours that he was considering the former Channel 7 site as a potential State significant site under the State environmental planning policy for major projects and that there was a proposal to put 900 residential dwellings on the site. In the letter, I asked the Minister to determine that the site is not of State and regional importance and to allow Parramatta City Council to undertake its normal decision making in relation to development applications.

In the reply I received in December 2005 the Minister said that following an approach from Channel 7, he had agreed to consider the potential to declare the site a State significant site and to consider a concept plan. In the letter he indicated that he had not made a decision, and that he had forwarded my letter to the department for its information. After further pressing, in January of this year I received a letter from the Parliamentary Secretary—the Minister did not seem to think that it was important to continue direct correspondence so he replied through his Parliamentary Secretary. With no disrespect to that office holder, it indicated to me that in the Minister's mind the matter was being downgraded and pushed aside as an irritant. I was advised by the Parliamentary Secretary that the Minister had agreed to consider a concept plan for the site and that public submissions were being reviewed. And that was where the matter stood: the Minister had not made a decision.

Apart from a large number of letters in similar or identical terms as responses to constituents, I have heard nothing more from the Minister. In addition to writing to the Minister, I raised the matter in a private member's statement in the House on 17 November. At that time I outlined a number of issues of concern, apart from the bulk of this development. I said that the site had a history of major life-threatening flooding down into the Eastwood area under the control of Ryde City Council, that there had been two massive flood events, and that run-off from the high ground that the Channel 7 site occupies acts as a natural accelerator in major flooding to create problems.

I simply thought that problems attendant on the development of a largely open greenfield site, which would be substantially covered by dwellings that act as mini accelerators during heavy rain events, would be better considered by councils rather than a department in the central business district or wherever it is located these days. Another major issue is traffic generation, especially along Mobbs Lane. The development site has a street address of 61 Mobbs Lane. The street—when I say "street" I mean the actual road paving—has not developed much from when it was originally laid some time around 1900 as access to a dairy. The road is barely coping with current traffic volumes, let alone what would be generated by a development of many hundreds of units. A number of other issues also need to be taken into account.

Epping Civic Trust, under the leadership of its president, Graham Lovell, has taken an active part in this issue. It first raised the matter in its October 2004 newsletter under the heading, "What type of residential development for the Channel 7 site?" It has followed through pretty assiduously ever since. A meeting organised by the trust was held on 27 June this year. A large number of people attended that significant meeting and a number of resolutions were passed. In July this year, I received a letter from constituents of mine, Barbara and John Buzio, who live in Valley Road Epping near this development. They said that they had attended the public meeting organised by the Epping Civic trust. The letter stated:

As the Parramatta Council can no longer successfully represent the concerns of the community in this matter I ask you to take up the battle on our behalf and use the strength of the opposition to block the move of having the decision on the development of that Channel 7 site left to the Planning Minister, Mr Frank Sartor, but instead have it referred back to Parramatta Council where it rightfully belongs.

I do not think they are criticising the council, and I do not read it that way. The letter became a request for me to introduce a private member's bill—that is what it amounts to—and that is what I have done. I refer to other letters from constituents that reflect the type of comments that have been in a large number of representations I have received from individuals. Most have been individual representations, not roneoed or copied letters—they number about 100 at this time. In a letter dated 8 August 2006 N. and A. Cartwright said:

I feel quite strongly that the approval power has been taken away from our local Parramatta City Council into your department's hands—

The letter was addressed to the Minister but sent care of me, and I passed it on. It continued:

Our local council knows our area and because the Councillors live locally they voice the residents' opinions. They have our interests and what is best for our area at heart. Do you?

That question is directed at the Minister. It continued:

How long have you lived in the area, Mr Sartor? I don't believe that you ever have! You can't be an expert on everything—leave local Councils to deal with proposed developments in their area. They know the local area best.

In a letter dated 7 August—again, it was addressed to the Minister but sent care of me—Mr Eric Bentley said:

Our Council, consisting of local representatives, is in the best position to judge the appropriate level of development on the site and will involve the local community in its deliberations.

It is my view that the current development proposal before you for this site is a gross overdevelopment for the following reasons:

1. Density of units too many and far in excess of Council's planning controls.
2. Height too high and out of character with the surrounding area.
3. Traffic chaos in neighbouring streets never designed to take the levels of traffic predicted to be generated by the development.

Recently I received an email from Darryl Lance of the Loftus Square Park Committee in Epping which stated:

We have heard from our Councillors that Mr Sartor has control over this development and that no consultation will be had.

If that is the case it is a travesty ...

What right does Mr Sartor think he has to take control of something that should be under our Council's jurisdiction?

We elected our very capable councillors and demand that they are allowed to do what they were elected for, look after our interests.

As I said, I have received a large number of what I consider high-quality representations from constituents who have considered this matter carefully and are disturbed about it. I have sent those representations to the Minister as and when they arrived. I am more than a little irritated that after the letter I received from the Parliamentary Secretary on 6 January I have not officially heard anything more, except a repeat of the contents of that letter. Indeed, I had to read in the local paper that apparently the Minister had made a decision, which as best I can tell was gazetted on or about 16 August 2006, that the site was to be a State significant site under the New South Wales environmental planning policy.

Not only have my constituents, Parramatta City Council and I been ignored, but we have not even been paid the elementary courtesy of being told that the Minister had made a decision. We had to read about it in the local paper. That is typical of the Minister's arrogance. The Premier needs to look out for the Minister for Planning. I think a large number of people around this State are sick to death of that Minister and the way he exercises his powers. Right around the State people have just about had enough of not being given the courtesy of being told when a decision has been made.

I now speak about Parramatta councillors. As many honourable members are aware, the Parramatta City Council reflects the views of the major political parties to varying degrees. The council has for many years returned a Labor administration. As with councils of that persuasion and others, I do not always see eye to eye with them. But I have to say this in relation to Parramatta council: as far as I can tell, I believe it has always

tried to do the right thing in exercising its powers to assess developments. Some councils struggle to do that; some councils simply struggle to exist.

Parramatta council still has under its control one of the largest central business districts in the whole of Australia. It would be assessing, on a regular basis, some of the most complex development applications to come before any council anywhere in Australia. As far as I can tell, the council has always conducted itself in what appears to me to be a fair, reasonable and professional fashion. Therefore, it is eminently capable of carrying out all assessments required on this site. There is no reason whatever to take away from Parramatta City Council its powers over this site.

The Minister could have said that he had identified certain problems with the Parramatta council and attempted to make out a case that he did not believe Parramatta council was capable of determining this development application. He has not made out such a case, because I do not think he is capable of making out that case. By that, I mean I do not think there is any evidence that would justify his making out the case. There is no basis whatever for the department taking over planning in this area. In fact, I would invite whoever will, down the track, write the speech in response to the debate on this bill—whether that be the Minister or the department—to itemise and particularise exactly where Parramatta City Council has fallen short and thus justify the Minister taking this step. What elements, what allegations, what issues go to the Parramatta City Council being incompetent—in the Minister's eyes, apparently—or unable to properly consider this development application?

There had better be a pretty good answer to that question made in the Government's reply to debate on this bill, which I suspect it will oppose and reject. The least the Government can do, if it opposes the bill, is identify where Parramatta City Council has fallen short in this matter. I do not believe the Government can demonstrate that. If it cannot, why is the Minister taking this power from the council? On what basis could the Minister possibly justify stripping a council of its powers to consider a development application, in the absence of any evidence that the council is incapable of doing so?

Parramatta City Council has considered the most extraordinarily complex applications, particularly relating to the Parramatta central business district. This is one of the major growth central business districts in Australia. I have never heard it said that there is a problem with the Parramatta council considering such applications—apart from, in the ordinary course, people from time to time having a difference of opinion about whether a particular project is a good one or a bad one, or whether this is right or that is right. Within the parameters of that type of debate, I have never heard of Parramatta City Council's competence, under Labor or non-Labor administrations, ever being seriously questioned on these issues.

I ask the Minister to provide the evidence, if there be any, of where Parramatta City Council has fallen down to such an extent to warrant his intervention. If he cannot particularise that, I ask him to reconsider—given what he will do with this legislation—and to back off and let the Parramatta council consider this application like it does every other matter. Who knows, it may well be that having council consider the application would result in a much more acceptable local resolution of the issues than the Minister ever will. I would say to the developers that they might like to think about that too. Why is it that the developers have rushed in to get the Minister involved? Are they trying to do something here that they know the local council would not approve of? If they are, what is it? Maybe Mr Sartor could tell us that. Have any instructions or requests come from the developers to the Government to bypass the council on this matter? What is there at that level that has caused the triggering of this Government action?

I would have thought if the developers and a Minister of the Crown in this State were trying to settle upon an outcome that is acceptable to the public and is balanced against the local public interest and the developer interests, Parramatta City Council is the way to go. The Minister cannot possibly assess local concerns from some office in the Sydney CBD, or wherever he is. That is, and always has been, best done through local councils and local councillors. They are in a unique position to do that. It is interesting that all three Government members in the Chamber now—I think I am right in saying this—have had quite significant local government experience. I am told that two have; but I was right, there are three.

**Mr David Campbell:** The Speaker is not a member of the Government.

**Mr ANDREW TINK:** I will leave it to my illustrious successor as shadow Leader of the House to deal with that allegation! People understand that councils are best able to deal with this sort of conflict resolution.

**Mr David Campbell:** Not any more.

**Mr ANDREW TINK:** They are in a unique position—

**Mr David Campbell:** Not any more.

**Mr ANDREW TINK:** I take up the remark made by the Minister, who said, "Not any more." That reflects the type of attitude that the Minister responsible for this bill is demonstrating. I ask them both to reconsider their attitude on this sort of issue. Councillors are both elected representatives and people who exercise considerable executive authority in the sense of ultimately voting on these sorts of issues, and they ought to be left to get on with that. I commend the bill to the House. I ask the Minister, for a third and final time, to justify why he is refusing to allow Parramatta City Council to determine this matter. If he cannot come up with some damned good reasons, he ought to back off and leave this matter to the council—unless and until it demonstrates that it has made major mistakes. I say again: I do not believe Parramatta City Council, with its track record under whatever administration, has any history whatever of bad mistakes in these sorts of matters—even if, from time to time, we disagree with a particular decision. They are made honestly and competently, and the Minister has no reason to intervene.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr David Campbell.**

## **PAY-ROLL TAX AMENDMENT (SUPPORTING JOBS AND SMALL BUSINESS) BILL**

### **Second Reading**

**Debate resumed from 13 October 2005.**

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL** (Keira—Minister for Water Utilities, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for the Illawarra) [10.30 a.m.]: The Government is opposed to the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill, and I will explain why. It is a bit hypocritical of the Opposition to bring forward a bill of this nature when payroll peaked at 8 per cent when the Coalition was last in office.

**Ms Peta Seaton:** Shame!

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** It is a shame. I note that the shadow Treasurer says it is a shame that they peaked at 8 per cent under the last Coalition Government, and that is why it is hypocritical of the Opposition to introduce this bill. The Coalition had payroll tax at 8 per cent when it was in office.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Southern Highlands will have the chance to reply in the appropriate way. She will not continue to call out while the Minister is addressing the House.

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** The Coalition had payroll tax in this State at 8 per cent when it was last in government, and it is now at 6 per cent through the dogged, determined, hard policy work of the Labor Government. The payroll tax cuts introduced by the Labor Government have ensured that New South Wales remains an attractive location for businesses to operate. Payroll tax has been progressively reduced to its current 6 per cent. That is a saving to employers of more than \$900 million in 2006-07. It is important to point out that less than 10 per cent of all businesses in New South Wales are liable for payroll tax. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of all businesses in New South Wales pay no payroll tax; certainly the overwhelming majority of all small businesses pay no payroll tax in New South Wales under the targeted and appropriate policies of this Government.

The Government has also raised the payroll tax threshold from the Coalition's \$550,000 to a more sensible and more appropriate \$600,000. The Government has also introduced payroll tax exemptions for trainees and apprentices, as we seek to encourage businesses to train people. As the honourable member for Wollongong says, that is a commendable thing to do—to encourage people into training roles as part of the drive to improve the skills base of the State, particularly in regional economies such as the Illawarra. We have also made sensible and deliverable changes to payroll tax that help all those who are liable.

In stark contrast, the Opposition's proposal that we are debating—to increase the threshold—is not targeted. It assists businesses only in a very small payroll range. The Opposition bill fails to outline how its

policy, which, according to members opposite, will cost \$282 million, is to be funded. So, we see the Peter meter in action again—more expenditure but no process to fund it. It is laughable that the bill's title contains the words "supporting jobs and small business" when the Opposition's reckless spending commitments would send small businesses to the wall, leading to higher unemployment. If this proposal were adopted, the cost would be reduced government services for the people of New South Wales, a familiar theme of this Opposition's adventures into public policy-making. Small business would be much happier if the Opposition were to support it in a regime of increasing interest rates. Members of the Opposition are silent on this. They will not ask John Howard or Peter Costello to do something about interest rates. They have been totally silent on the issue of increase fuel costs.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Members of the Government will cease interjecting across the Chamber. Members on both sides of the House will come to order and allow the Minister to make his contribution.

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** As the honourable member for Strathfield and the honourable member for Wollongong interject, the Opposition just does not stand up for New South Wales. It certainly does not stand up for the small business sector in regard to interest rates and rising fuel prices. The gaggle on the other side of this Chamber has not learnt anything about the importance of fiscal discipline and has fumbled around in Opposition. The Opposition's over commitments have climbed to more than \$20 billion on that Peter meter. That is more than half the annual State budget. The Opposition is fiscally irresponsible, and this bill demonstrates that fiscal irresponsibility. The Opposition's crazy spending proposals would rip New South Wales' triple-A credit rating to pieces and would send the State bankrupt.

Unlike the Opposition's confused stab in the dark policy, the Government's new payroll tax scheme is totally targeted at businesses that relocate to or expand in regions of New South Wales with higher than average unemployment—regions such as the far North Coast and Northern Rivers. One would think the honourable member for Lismore would be supporting the Government's policy that targets investment for new jobs in the far North Coast region. On 23 February this year the Premier announced a \$95 million payroll tax incentive scheme to encourage business investment and job creation in New South Wales.

The program will provide a payroll tax exemption worth up to \$144,000 a year for the first three years for businesses investing in areas of New South Wales with higher than average unemployment. Those businesses will also receive a payroll tax discount in years four and five. The initiative assists small- to medium-sized businesses looking to establish or expand in New South Wales. The payroll tax incentive will be available for start-up businesses in their first year of operation, businesses relocating from interstate or overseas—there are many of them—and expanding businesses liable for payroll tax for the first time.

The clear message to the community is that New South Wales is open for business. This Government is determined to encourage investment and boost employment. New South Wales continues to enjoy historically low unemployment rates, but the business community has identified payroll tax as a priority issue. This incentive program of the Government will directly appeal to businesses interested in creating employment. In just 12 months this Government has cut many State taxes, including the abolition of vendor duty. It has made an initial 5 per cent reduction in workers compensation premiums, to be followed by a further 10 per cent cut in workers compensation premiums.

That initiative was warmly welcomed, as the honourable member for Illawarra and the honourable member for Wollongong will recall, by the Illawarra Business Chamber. As the honourable member for Wollongong said, it was celebrated by the Illawarra Business Chamber. The Government has also delivered a fair and responsible deal for clubs. It has raised the land tax threshold from \$330,000 to \$352,000, exempting an extra 12,000 to 13,000 small investment property owners from land tax. The payroll tax incentive I have been discussing will be directed at businesses seeking to relocate or expand in the following regions: Richmond-Tweed and the mid North Coast, Illawarra and Wollongong, Fairfield-Liverpool, Newcastle, Central Coast, outer south-western Sydney, Canterbury-Bankstown and the Hunter.

Eligibility for the exemption will not be affected by improved employment statistics in the nominated regions. The Government's sensible payroll tax incentive scheme stands in stark contrast to the Opposition's unfunded policy adventure. The New South Wales Government has also led a strong argument to the Commonwealth for an increased share of the goods and services tax. The honourable member for Southern Highlands was screaming and screeching earlier about the Illawarra Business Chamber. The Illawarra Business Chamber, as part of Australian Business Ltd, has warmly and strongly supported the Government's call for the Commonwealth to allocate more GST to New South Wales.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Southern Highlands will have the opportunity to reply to the debate.

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** As always, the New South Wales Opposition refuses to stand up for New South Wales and to stand up to its bosses in Canberra to call for a greater share of GST revenue for New South Wales. The number of services that funding would support across New South Wales, whether it be in the small business sector or in training, is measurable. That \$3 billion would be a great support to the State's economy. Our strong economy, with our triple-A credit rating, means we have a strong environment for hardworking small business people who often put in 24 hours a day running their businesses. Our strong economy gives them the opportunity to put in that effort and make a quid to support their families. The recklessness in the bill would undermine those efforts of the small business sector. It is vandalism of the State's economy for the Opposition to run around with all these unfunded promises. Whether they are core promises or non-core promises, if I can quote from the Prime Minister's get-out-of-gaol card, remains to be seen.

Small business in New South Wales knows that the New South Wales Government supports it strongly. That is why so many small business operators will take part in events during Small Business September, which starts on Friday. About 300 events are to be held around New South Wales, with more than that 100 different sponsors and partners hosting those events. There will be a number of networking events, business facilitation events and events that will encourage people to look at their business management skills. Such events will bring people together to look at trade opportunities and the opportunities that go with expanding business as a result of that. The Small Business September initiative is another example of how the New South Wales Government demonstrates to our community that the Government means business and that New South Wales is open for business.

**Mr THOMAS GEORGE** (Lismore) [10.39 a.m.]: The object of the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill 2005 is to amend the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 to increase the tax-free threshold for payroll tax from \$600,000 to \$850,000, which will take effect from 1 July 2007. Now I can understand why small businesses in this State are struggling. The Minister for Small Business stood in this House and claimed that the Government had lifted the land tax threshold. But who brought every landholder in New South Wales into the land tax bracket? Which government was it? It was none other than this Government. For 12 months the Government took the money, then increased the threshold to big-note itself. The Minister for Small Business, as part of the Carr-Iemma, Government says that the Government removed the vendor tax. But who introduced it in the first place? Who introduced the club tax? Again, it was the Carr-Iemma Government and, again, the Government is big-noting itself for lifting the club tax.

Let us consider workers compensation. I would like the Minister for Small Business to produce documentation to prove to me that workers compensation premiums have been reduced for small businesses in this State. I have asked a number of small business operators in my electorate to provide documentation that their premiums for payroll tax have been reduced, but no-one has been able to provide me with that evidence. I challenge the Minister for Small Business to produce the figures of any small business that has had its payroll tax reduced overall. As the House knows, I have been involved with the Northern Co-operative Meat Company Limited at Casino. It is all declared in my interests. I was a director of the company. For years I have been complaining about payroll taxes in the border areas where the company has been brutalised year after year because of the ineptitude of the Government, which promised 5 per cent payroll tax in 1997 when the Labor Party came to power.

**Mr David Campbell:** Get your facts right. It was 1995.

**Mr THOMAS GEORGE:** I correct that. If it was 1995 the Government has done nothing for 11 years to honour its promise of reducing payroll tax to 5 per cent. Instead the Government has offered payroll assistance to people in start-up businesses. It has not helped one person who is paying payroll tax today. Which businesses are benefiting from the Government's payroll tax assistance today? I challenge the Minister to produce the names of businesses that are benefiting, but I doubt whether he will be able to. The trouble with the Government is that it does not support current businesses. It wants to look after only new businesses.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wollongong will come to order.

**Mr THOMAS GEORGE:** Businesses in this State that are currently struggling to meet their payroll tax and workers compensation premiums do not get any benefits from the Government's decisions. The bill is important because it would lift the threshold for payroll tax from \$600,000 to \$850,000. It will support

businesses that need support, current businesses that could employ extra staff if the payroll tax threshold were lifted. A company in Lismore that employs 40 painters is currently paying payroll tax. It does a lot of government work, but it has to compete with painting contractors from over the border in Queensland where the payroll tax threshold is not a problem. The Queensland contractors come into New South Wales, quote against New South Wales contractors and get the jobs—government jobs. New South Wales companies cannot lower their prices because of our payroll tax threshold. There is no support for New South Wales companies. The Government should reconsider its position and support the bill instead of knocking it. Employers in this State who pay payroll tax need support, and they need it now.

The Minister for Small Business went to Kyogle following the disaster at Norply to offer assistance. I was there this week and I have been writing to the Government to get help for the Kyogle Neighbourhood Centre, which has helped small businesses and has tried to be there to assist individuals. But, no, we cannot get any support for them from the Government. What support does the Minister suggest the Government is providing to country and regional New South Wales? The next time the Minister intends to be in my area I will supply him with a telephone so that he can ring me to tell me when he is coming into my electorate. It is a shame. The Minister for Small Business stands in this place and tells us what the Carr-Iemma Government is doing and, in my opinion, not doing for the business community in this State. I am proud to stand in this place and support the shadow Treasurer in her presentation of the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill 2005. I call on the Government to reverse its decision. I urge the Government to support this very important bill.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS** (Lane Cove) [10.46 a.m.]: I support our shadow Treasurer and the honourable member for Lismore, who spoke to the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill 2005. Out of all the taxes in this country, payroll tax has to be the most stupid because it is, as we all know, a tax on jobs. A Liberal-National Coalition government will cut payroll tax by increasing the New South Wales payroll tax threshold to \$850,000 at a flat rate of 6 per cent in line with Queensland's threshold. The Coalition policy is about giving New South Wales businesses an even break. Under the Coalition policy New South Wales businesses will pay less than the equivalent business in Queensland. I commend our shadow Treasurer, who has the vision, the leadership and the ability to take New South Wales into the black, and attract jobs and investment back to New South Wales.

Smaller businesses will receive the greatest proportional benefit. Some 22,000 businesses that have payrolls over the threshold will save up to \$15,000. A Coalition government would cut payroll tax revenues in 2007-08 by \$282 million, which would bring more than 4,500 businesses under the threshold. The money they save by paying reduced payroll tax can be put back into their businesses to employ more people. As we know, the New South Wales Labor Government has extended payroll tax liability to include bonuses, gifts and other financial benefits to staff as wages for the purposes of payroll tax. In December 2004, 28,267 businesses were liable for payroll tax, which is an increase from 26,730 in December 2003.

I will compare and contrast the payroll tax paid under this high-taxing Labor Government with the policy of the Coalition, which will result in increased employment and growth in New South Wales. For example, under the payroll tax policy of the Labor Government companies with a \$700,000 payroll pay \$6,000, but under a Coalition government companies with a threshold of \$850,000 will pay zero. Companies with a payroll of \$800,000 currently pay \$12,000 in payroll tax, but they will pay zero under a Coalition government. Companies with a payroll of \$1,000,050 currently pay \$27,000 in payroll tax, but they will pay only \$12,000 under a Coalition government.

Companies with a payroll of \$2 million currently pay \$84,000 in payroll tax, but they will pay only \$69,000 under a Coalition government. Companies with a payroll tax of \$3.4 million currently pay \$168,000 in payroll tax, but they will pay only \$153,000 under a Coalition government. Australian Business Limited [ABL] states that it costs businesses in New South Wales \$2,627 for every person they employ, taking into account workers compensation premiums and payroll tax. On average New South Wales employers are paying an additional \$1,100 per employee in payroll tax and workers compensation premiums than employers in Queensland. New South Wales is not competitive. The cost of employment for businesses in New South Wales is 71 per cent higher than it is in Queensland and 19 per cent higher than in Victoria.

**Ms Noreen Hay:** Point of order: The honourable member for Lane Cove is misleading the House. The member says that the Opposition has a policy. We all know the Opposition has no policies.



**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wollongong cannot dispute an issue by taking a point of order. If she feels aggrieved, she may make her point by making a personal explanation or contributing to the debate.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** After 11 years, coming up to 12 years, of neglect of the small business sector by the Carr-Iemma Government, it is time to get the monkey off the back of small business in New South Wales. Under Labor, New South Wales continues to lag behind other States. New South Wales used to be the engine room of the Australian economy. Now we are the millstone. The major reason for this State's poor economic performance is the incredible burden of red tape and regulation that Labor has inflicted on businesses. As the shadow Treasurer, the honourable member for Lismore and the honourable member for Hornsby can confirm, when we talk to small business owners they tell us how much they are suffering under this Government.

A Coalition government will reduce the red tape imposed on businesses in order to stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities. Our six-point plan will steer the State's staggered economy onto the road to recovery by reducing red tape and introducing accountability measures to ensure that New South Wales businesses have the ability to prosper. It is estimated that New South Wales businesses spend about 200 hours each year filling in forms to comply with regulations. The State has recorded some of the lowest business competencies of any State or Territory for the last seven to eight quarters. Under this Labor Government there is no end to this situation in sight.

As the honourable member for Lismore said in his speech, the Government's plan—which it has put together with a bit of wire and sticky tape as it trundles along, trying to get re-elected—does not help country New South Wales. The State Government's focus is on New South Wales: Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. With respect to the honourable member for Wollongong, the Coalition has the full support of the Illawarra Chamber of Commerce. We have the support of the New South Wales Chamber of Commerce and most chambers of commerce throughout the State. In relation to payroll tax the ABL said:

Payroll tax continues to be a burden on NSW businesses. NSW has the highest payroll tax rate in Australia ... and the Budget projects accumulated increases of \$3.5 billion going forward.

The ABL continued:

The payroll tax burden is increasing—and it makes no sense to increase the burden on business when NSW is the slowest growing state in Australia, with the highest business taxes and the highest unemployment.

The ABL has done its work. It said that Victoria cut payroll tax in its State budget. Victoria is looking at a sensible way forward because it knows it has to compete with other States, such as Queensland. It has no competition from New South Wales under this Government. I hope that after March next year the State will have a new Treasurer who will bring jobs and economic growth back to New South Wales. A Coalition government will support not only metropolitan and regional New South Wales but also rural New South Wales.

**Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [10.54 a.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill 2005, which was introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands. I emphasise "supporting jobs and small business", which is what the Government should be doing by way of legislation and initiatives. The object of the bill is to amend the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 to increase the tax-free threshold for payroll tax from \$600,000 to \$850,000. The increase would take effect on 1 July 2007. By way of explanation, the bill states:

An employer is not liable to pay pay-roll tax for a financial year if the total taxable wages and interstate wages paid or payable by the employer during that year is less than \$850,000.

In relation to an employer with a payroll of \$850,000 or more the bill states:

If the total taxable wages and interstate wages paid or payable by an employer during a financial year is \$850,000 or more, the employer is liable to pay as pay-roll tax for that year the amount of dollars calculated in accordance with the following formula ...

I will not detail the formula at this stage. The essence of the legislation is to remove red tape and lessen the burden on small business. Over the past four years I have worked closely with my local chambers of commerce at Hornsby and Galston. There is nothing more important for those chambers of commerce than to lessen the burden on small business and encourage their growth, so that they are able to operate their businesses more

efficiently. They want small business to have scope for growth so that they can employ more young people and others. Currently small businesses are in a stranglehold as a result of the taxes imposed on them and the amount of red tape. Small business owners spend many hours each year filling out forms, which takes them away from their businesses.

This morning I spoke to the president of the Hornsby Chamber of Commerce. I speak to him regularly. As I have previously reported to the Parliament, I spend a great deal of time visiting businesses in the company of chamber of commerce members and I am involved in the Pollies for Small Business Day. I am well in sync with the need to remove any excess hindrance upon businesses to grow, thereby assisting the State's economy. Small business is being hampered by this Government as a result of the amount of impost it places on them. Greg Bepper, the president of Hornsby Chamber of Commerce, welcomes this legislation with open arms. He has daily conversations with small business owners who tell him they are up to their necks in red tape. They would love to put more money back into their businesses and have the ability to employ more staff. At the moment they are reluctant to do so.

Mr Bepper has stressed to me the plight of small businesses with fewer than five personnel. They will have as much paperwork as large businesses. The owners and managers of small businesses with fewer than five personnel often work on the floor with their employees. For example, Brian Endycott is the owner of Thyme Square, a coffee shop in Hornsby with fewer than five employees. He works in the shop making coffees and assisting with sales, but he also has the impost of paperwork, red tape and payroll tax. He would benefit 100 per cent from the introduction of this legislation, so I urge the Government to take on board the provisions of the bill. He would love to put money back into his business and increase his business, but he is being held back.

The Government now has the opportunity to support legislation that will exempt 4,500 businesses from having to pay payroll tax and provide a reduction of \$15,000 for each of the 22,000 businesses that currently are liable to pay payroll tax. Both measures would be a welcome relief for small businesses. No doubt this legislation will create jobs, improve competitiveness and support small businesses. As we all know, small businesses across the nation are the backbone of our economy. It is important to provide all possible relief for small business people.

I cite some recommendations of Australian Business Ltd [ABL] published in the "NSW Mid Term Report 2005." ABL has set out an action plan that it advocates the Government should adopt to promote business in this State. The Government should establish an expenditure task force under the chairmanship of a Minister for economic reform to cut the increase in government expenditure that is putting additional taxation pressure on New South Wales businesses, thereby making them uncompetitive against businesses in Queensland and Victoria. The Government should also commence a four-year program to cut payroll tax from 6 per cent to 5.5 per cent and increase the tax-free threshold to \$700,000. At that level, the rate would still be above Queensland's rate of 4.75 per cent and 5.25 per cent in Victoria, but the Government will need to forgo approximately \$600 million of the projected \$3.7 billion increase in payroll tax revenues.

The Government should also further invest in infrastructure, negotiate with the Federal Government to develop a simplified, unified workplace relations system, and return the benefits of the workers compensation scheme surpluses to businesses in the form of lower premiums. The performance of the workers compensation scheme has improved in recent years and the benefits should be passed on. The Government should also engage constructively with business on labour force and skills issues. The Government should establish and implement a coherent strategy to address the current skills crisis and future skills needs. ABL recommends as a matter of urgency a review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act with particular focus on reforming the duty of care. The current application of duty of care is having significant and unforeseen consequences, including many smaller businesses giving up on occupational health and safety legislation because compliance is far too difficult.

The Government should also amend the draft workplace fatalities legislation by adopting ABL's five-point plan. There is no doubt that payroll tax deduction is a key plank in ABL's platform for regenerating the health of the New South Wales economy. For the reasons I have stated, it is essential for this Government to wholeheartedly endorse and support the Pay-Roll Tax Amendments (Supporting Jobs in Small Business) Bill that is before the House. Governments should be constantly looking for opportunities to reduce taxes and provide an economic return to businesses. That is essential for the development of the small business sector and the provision of opportunities and benefits for individuals and families. As the shadow Minister has stated, a dollar in the hands of a fellow citizen will be better spent than a dollar in the hands of government, and government should impose upon itself the highest level of rigor and performance testing to ensure that

government waste and duplication are eradicated and that savings are put into essential front-line services that are expected by citizens and the needy, and into tax relief to promote more jobs and economic activity.

Under Labor, New South Wales is the highest taxing State and relies heavily on payroll tax—a tax on jobs—to produce revenue to pay for a bloated, top heavy, non-productive bureaucracy. It is amazing that this Government has got away with a top-heavy bureaucracy that is taking away resources from front-line services. The existing payroll tax rate exacerbates the taxation burden borne by business and creates more obstacles for decent hardworking business owners. I urge the Government to vote in favour of the bill and to waste no time in doing so.

**Mr ANDREW STONER** (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.04 a.m.]: There is no doubt that payroll tax is a tax on jobs. When payroll tax in New South Wales is out of kilter with payroll tax arrangements in other States, there will be a resultant loss of jobs to New South Wales, a loss of businesses and an exodus of families from this State. Clearly, that has transpired in recent years. An ever-increasing number of jobs, businesses and families have been fleeing to other jurisdictions, in particular to Queensland. What is the Government's plan to combat this? The Government simply does not have a plan. The rate of economic and employment growth in New South Wales is the worst in the nation, despite an abundance of wealth and resources in this State.

Although the Government does not have a plan to deal with the loss of business to this State, the Opposition does. The Liberal-Nationals Coalition's plan is detailed in the bill that has been introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands, the Pay-Roll Tax Amendments (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill, which I commend to the House. Effectively the bill will provide relief to 4,500 businesses in the form of an exemption from payroll tax. Such relief will enable businesses to employ more people in New South Wales and assist in improving our economy. By raising the payroll tax threshold from \$600,000 to \$850,000, the legislation will save the average business approximately \$15,000 per annum. The policy is good for businesses in New South Wales, good for the creation of jobs in New South Wales, and will therefore benefit New South Wales communities.

The Government may wish to draw attention to its recent payroll tax policy that provides for exemptions to be doled out to particular areas of this State, but guess what? Although the Government claims that the selected areas were based on unemployment rates, they equate roughly to the metropolitan areas of this State. As the Leader of The Nationals, I make the point that regional and rural areas of New South Wales suffer unacceptable levels of unemployment. With the exception of the North Coast, the only break the Government has provided in payroll tax was for business in "NSW"—that is, Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. This Sydney-centric Government's version of "NSW" is Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong whereas The Nationals believe that "NSW" stands also for the North Coast, the South Coast, and areas west of the Great Dividing Range. Clearly there are many rural communities with unacceptable levels of unemployment that should be receiving the benefit of a payroll tax break.

The Liberal-Nationals Coalition will include the provisions of this bill as part of the Coalition's legislative reform agenda, and the Coalition in government will provide relief to businesses in rural and regional areas of New South Wales as well as to businesses in metropolitan areas of this State. In short, while the Labor Government might be prepared to stick its head in the sand as businesses flee to other more favourable jurisdictions and take with them jobs and families, the Federal Coalition Government has assisted families to move by the provision of a grant of \$5,000. The contrast could not be more stark: This Labor Government, through its high taxation regime and inattention to the provision of basic services, is encouraging people to leave New South Wales. That is not good enough. I commend the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs in Small Business) Bill to the House.

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [11.08 a.m.]: I also support the bill introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands to alter payroll tax arrangements in New South Wales. The object of the bill is to increase the tax-free threshold from \$600,000 to \$850,000. Payroll tax is often thoroughly debated, particularly in the lead-up to an election, but the history of payroll tax in New South Wales reveals that, by its nature, it is a significant revenue raiser for the operations and activities carried on in New South Wales. Indeed, payroll tax has been the instrument by which business had made very significant contributions to revenue in New South Wales.

We must be fair about this. Regardless of the political persuasion of the party that is in power, the State is constantly being asked to improve arrangements in all areas in New South Wales. We must be fair when we

seek to reduce tax revenue and we must fully understand its impact. I am also persuaded by the argument to be competitive. It is important to be competitive. If we are to compete locally, we must ensure that New South Wales is competitive with other States and Territories as well as the international community.

For many years New South Wales has been out of step in relation to payroll tax. This well-considered bill would make New South Wales competitive with other States and Territories. I know there will always be pressures with respect to revenue. The Government asked what we would like reduced if we were to reduce the tax take. As I represent regional and rural New South Wales I wish to put another perspective on that. A considerable number of overdevelopment issues are raised constantly in metropolitan New South Wales. Development and growth opportunities are called for in rural, regional and remote parts of New South Wales.

I would like to see not only an increase of the payroll tax threshold, which would help small business; I would like to see also a differential payroll tax rate between country and city. That would create an opportunity and a culture in which businesses could locate, expand and be competitive in regional, rural and remote parts of this State, as they have done in other States. The Minister for Small Business has been a regular visitor to the northern part of the State. He announced a number of initiatives and opportunities that will create incentives to do things in regional and rural areas. I hope the Commonwealth is made aware of the fact that payroll tax, zonal tax and other issues are incentive-based programs.

Using taxation is an important lever to create opportunities in regional, rural and remote parts of the State. I hope that is something the State and Commonwealth governments can achieve by working together. It must be remembered that New South Wales is a State and not a city. It is important that opportunities are developed broadly and equally across the State taking pressure off much of the infrastructure the metropolitan area clearly is struggling with, and will continue to struggle with, regardless of who happens to govern. If 700 to 1,000 people a week continue to arrive in the metropolitan area, there will be constant and increasing pressure on this State's infrastructure.

Earlier other honourable members said that payroll tax was an unusual tax in that it was a tax on employment. I acknowledge the contributions of Opposition members who said that it was one of our highest taxes. Whilst I recognise that payroll tax has existed for a considerable time, historically its percentage has been trending down in New South Wales. I acknowledge that, as I have looked at the figures. When the Coalition was last in government in New South Wales payroll tax was at 8 per cent, which is significantly higher than it is today. My contribution is not about—and it should not be about—apportioning blame historically; my contribution is about good policy. This bill goes part of the way towards creating good policy.

I would like to see a differential rate that actively encourages growth and relocation, decentralisation into regional communities—using not only payroll tax but also an incentive-based scheme as the Government has done in other areas, in particular, in education—and locating special government services in parts of the State that otherwise would have struggled. Education and health are two classic examples of the decentralisation of services. Payroll tax and other taxation incentives at both levels of government would be another welcome opportunity. This bill will help small businesses and it will reduce red tape. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr GREG APLIN** (Albury) [11.14 a.m.]: I support the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill and note that it was introduced in September 2005. As usual, it has taken considerable time for these ideas to drift through to the consciousness of the Government. On occasion the Government has seen fit to adopt aspects of the Coalition's policy, albeit in a discriminatory fashion, as in the Premier's statement of February this year. But more of that in a moment. When the honourable member for Southern Highlands introduced the bill she said in her second reading speech:

In introducing the Pay-Roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill 2005, ... the object of this bill is to amend the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 to increase the tax-free threshold for payroll tax from \$600,000 to \$850,000, with the increase to take effect on 1 July 2007. The legislation offers the chance to support legislation that will exempt 4,500 businesses from having to pay payroll tax at all, and a reduction of up to \$15,000 for each of the 22,000 businesses that are liable for payroll tax. This bill will create jobs, improve our State's competitiveness, and support small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy.

It is clear that under this Labor Government, New South Wales, the highest taxing State, relies heavily on payroll tax, which as we all know is a tax on jobs, or a tax on employment. Payroll tax produces revenue to pay for a rather bloated bureaucracy. As we heard from members who spoke earlier, in many cases that creates obstacles for decent, hardworking business owners. Far too often we hear that small businesses spend up to three hours a week on the red tape associated with payroll tax, which in itself is unproductive. However, when called

upon to have a good, hard look at reducing payroll tax and providing incentives to business before the State budget this year, the Premier said:

I would love to come out and announce a 1 per cent reduction in payroll tax, but I can't. Financially, that would not be responsible at this point in time. Until our financial capacity improves, much as I would love to announce a general reduction, it's not prudent.

Clearly, the management of this State is not in the hands of people who wish to create incentives, stimulate the economy and create a climate that would lead to increased employment and increased taxes through the various forms of tax that are already imposed. The rejection of any action on general payroll tax angered business groups because they had been pushing for a cut to encourage investment in this State to boost the sluggish economy. That predicament was intensified by the Victorian budget, which announced a reduction in payroll tax from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent over two years. In the electorate I represent on the southern border of New South Wales, the discrepancy between the two rates is felt keenly by businesses, particularly smaller businesses that have to decide on which side of the border to operate.

Clearly we want to retain businesses in New South Wales; it should be the powerhouse State and the leading State in the country. Unfortunately, the comparisons often result in people crossing the border because it is cheaper to do business, and create and run a business, in Victoria than it is in New South Wales. More to the point, there are incentives and a climate that encourage them to do so. That is the indictment we level at this State Government. Honourable members would be aware that the payroll tax rate of 4.75 per cent in Queensland is lower than the rate in New South Wales. Our State has the most sluggish growth rate of any other State in the country. In the last financial year it was only 1.1 per cent, and economic growth has consistently stayed below 2 per cent a year over the past four years. At the time of the budget the unemployment rate was 5.6 per cent—one of the highest rates in the country—compared with the national rate of 5.1 per cent. Of all the States only Tasmania is worse, with an unemployment rate of 6.6 per cent.

The retail trade has had moderate growth but it has suffered months and months of weakness. When it comes to building approvals we bear the brunt of the downturn in New South Wales, thanks to this Government's policies. In trading terms dwelling approvals for April fell by 2.9 per cent, which is more than in any other State, and at that time added up to 15 consecutive months of decline. I will address that issue in respect to Holbrook, which lies slightly to the north of Albury. Holbrook is currently located in the electorate of Wagga Wagga but from 24 March 2007 it will be in the electorate of Albury.

The Hyne timber mill in Holbrook suffered unfortunate job cuts during June and August of this year. The mid-August announcement that a further 41 jobs would be cut from the Holbrook timber mill was, of course, a huge blow for mill workers, for Holbrook and for Greater Hume shire. The layoffs were in addition to 62 jobs lost in June this year. Why do I raise this problem? As I have mentioned, people living in the southern parts of the State already have the comparisons with Victoria to contend with when it comes to payroll tax. Let us consider the words of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union organiser for southern New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, Mr Ken Miller. He said, "Holbrook must feel crushed." Why did he express that sentiment? He stated:

... the four by two house framing industry (three- to four-bedroom brick veneer home) was in a slump and as a result the timber has been piling up at Holbrook and at Tumbarumba.

Why is the industry in a slump? Purely because of this State Government's policies when it comes to development and the construction of housing. We find that the approvals for dwellings are at their lowest point since Australian Bureau of Statistics figures were collected. That is the problem that then filters through to businesses, such as the Hyne mill at Holbrook. That is the problem confronted by businesses in country regions.

I find it laughable that the Minister would announce that New South Wales is open for business, but he had the hide to stand in this House and proclaim that only this morning. He had the hide to tell us that this Government has reduced payroll tax in "certain areas". Clearly, discrimination is alive and well in New South Wales, discrimination that chooses particular areas of interest to the Government and excludes those areas where it has no hope of succeeding. Perhaps it is in aid of preferences, perhaps it is in aid of gaining votes, that this Government is motivated to introduce selective payroll tax. Clearly, when it comes to places such as Holbrook and Culcairn it has no interest in creating a climate for encouraging developers, or encouraging businesses to remain afloat and employ people. After all, that is one of the jobs for this Government. Let me quote the words of a developer, who clearly states what I believe to be the case in regional New South Wales. The developer said:

New South Wales is stuffed for developers.

Referring to legislation being considered by the Government that would allow developers to build on environmentally sensitive land, he said:

I see little hope that this legislation will eventuate.

The point I want to make here is that New South Wales certainly is stuffed for developers. I made the point earlier this year in speeches in this place that the message being sent out by this Government is that New South Wales is, in fact, closed for business when it comes to looking at operations such as the residential retirement village in the town of Henty in the Riverina, which lies midway between Albury and Wagga Wagga. The Government effectively opposed that development, and opposed it in such a fashion that it took the form of vilification of those who had been involved in attempting to assist that development in the town of Henty.

First in the firing line were, of course, the developers, but close behind them came the Greater Hume Shire Council. The fact that the local people wanted to see a \$14.6 million development in their town, the fact that it would create up to 90 jobs and the fact that it would house the older generation who had grown up in the Henty and Riverina region and allow them to settle close to their families, contacts and community of interest, was not of the slightest interest to this Government. This Government was interested purely in retaining its preferences with the Greens and making sure that no development would occur on rural land, even when this was not particularly environmentally sensitive land, given that it was a commercial golf course.

The developer in question took the issue to the Land and Environment Court, and I am very pleased to say that commonsense prevailed and this issue was settled in favour of the development with costs awarded against the Government. The point I make here is that when the Government claims that New South Wales is open for business—whether it is the Minister for Primary Industries and Minister for Natural Resources, the Attorney General or the Minister for the Environment—its actions are wholeheartedly opposed to promoting development in country areas. So, it is little wonder that they oppose this bill, which seeks to raise the threshold for payroll tax. The message clearly coming through is that this Government does not support country regions because it has no incentives to create and encourage development, and it certainly is not looking at extending its discriminatory approach when it comes to payroll tax. I urge honourable members to search their consciences and to put New South Wales back where it should be, at the top of the pile in Australia, and to vote for this payroll tax amendment supporting jobs and small business.

**Mr STEVEN PRINGLE** (Hawkesbury) [11.25 a.m.]: It is a pleasure to support the bill introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands, a bill that will obviously significantly benefit the people of New South Wales. Indeed, I believe this is one of the more important bills to come before the House during this session of Parliament and, quite frankly, every member on this side of the House is amazed that the Minister for Small Business has not expressed support for it. I point out that this State recently hosted Small Business Week when most members of this House were out supporting their local businesses and trying to encourage them to do more, to be more competitive and to create more sales. No doubt honourable members are aware of data from Australian Business Ltd [ABL] that indicates how badly this State is performing. This time last year ABL produced a Government report card on State competitiveness, and State competitiveness received a "D". The comment from ABL was:

Queensland outperforms NSW on every measure. High payroll tax and Workers Compensation premiums are hurting small business. ... Need to increase funding for key infrastructure. Work on reducing business compliance burden needed.

I am sure that a "D" from ABL is hardly surprising to any member of this House. ABL also focused on payroll tax as an example of the overall cost facing businesses in New South Wales. It used the example of a 15-employee business spending \$5,000 per month on rent and requiring three employee parking spaces. The company owned two cars, each worth \$20,000, and a van valued at \$50,000, all of which were included in the calculations. ABL research demonstrated just how uncompetitive New South Wales is compared with Queensland. The sum total of State taxes and charges in New South Wales was \$21,604 versus a mere \$2,010 in Queensland—an unbelievable difference. That is why honourable members should support this bill. I remind honourable members that ABL provided these figures.

Earlier I referred to Small Business Week. I was fortunate to work for Miller's Turf Supplies, a small- to medium-size business. That company, which employs about 12 people, is very innovative. Greg Miller won the title of Young Australian Farmer of the Year and I am pleased to report that he is a Hawkesbury resident. At his 220-hectare business premises he grows a variety of different grasses including kikuyu and Sir Walter

buffalo grass. He also produced a new grass that needs very little water and is salt tolerant. He is in the business of exporting turf to Malaysia and to other Australian States. He is working very hard to generate jobs and income for the people of the Hawkesbury and for the people of New South Wales, but his competitiveness is severely hampered by this Government's payroll tax. That payroll tax makes him uncompetitive in some areas as against the Queensland system. It is difficult to believe that the Minister for Small Business is opposed to this bill. The honourable member for Southern Highlands got it right, and I commend her actions today. I suggest that all honourable members should support the bill in order to make a difference, and so that New South Wales regains its competitiveness and its position as the premier State in the nation.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tony Stewart.**

**Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.**

### **SHOALHAVEN RIVER WATER EXTRACTION**

**Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK** (South Coast) [11.30 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that it is the Government's intention to massively increase water extraction from the Shoalhaven River;
- (2) calls on the Government to seriously commit to water recycling, re-use and water reclamation initiatives so as to reduce Sydney's growing reliance on the Shoalhaven River; and
- (3) notes the environmental stress already evident along the Shoalhaven River and the effect of this on the oyster and prawn industries of the area.

This is not the first time that I have spoken about this issue in the House. In fact, I gave notice of my intention to move this motion on 23 May this year, well before the Premier made his most recent announcement. I also spoke about this matter in 2004, when I quoted the comments of residents who were concerned about the 2004 Metropolitan Water Plan. For some two years I have been presenting to Parliament petitions containing more than 1,000 signatures. I have also received several hundreds of letters and emails on this issue.

This matter has concerned, and continues to concern, residents on the South Coast. Anyone who believes South Coast residents are not concerned about this issue, as the honourable member for Kiama asserts, does so at his or her peril. South Coast residents accept that transfers from Tallowa Dam are necessary and that the system begun in 1977 should continue to operate moderately and modestly. However, the concern of my constituents has been ignited by the Government's plan to increase water extractions massively and to construct tunnels that will entrench forever Sydney's reliance on the Shoalhaven River. The honourable member for Kiama knows absolutely nothing about that. South Coast residents are concerned not about the modest transfers that have been occurring but about the massive increased extractions that are now envisaged from the Shoalhaven River.

At this point we should examine briefly the history of the Government's various announcements both with respect to Sydney Water and Shoalhaven Water over the past couple of years. If the situation were not so serious, it would be comical. In 2004 the former Premier released a document entitled, "Meeting the Challenges: Securing Sydney's Water Future." What was it all about? The document said little about Sydney but a great deal about the Shoalhaven River. The Government proposed spending \$680 million of a \$700-million budget to build tunnels to carry more and more water from the Shoalhaven River to quench Sydney's thirst. That is what the document was about. In fact, the plan envisaged that by 2010, 50 billion litres to 60 billion litres of water would come to Sydney from the Shoalhaven River and that by 2020, 100 billion litres of water would be extracted. The Government has almost reached its 2020 target, with 75 billion litres of water extracted yearly from the river, and it proposes to extract an additional 30 billion litres.

The Government then decided to raise the height of Tallowa Dam to hold the extra water transfers from the Shoalhaven River. That was the plan, and construction was almost ready to start when the community made its voice heard. The Government suddenly realised that raising the height of Tallowa Dam would flood sections of Kangaroo Valley and perhaps take out the historic Hamden Bridge. So—surprise, surprise—it backed down and decided not to raise the height of Tallowa Dam. However, the ensuing intense media scrutiny of dropping water levels in Warragamba Dam was politically damaging for the Government. As a result of that scrutiny and in an attempt to avoid dam levels dropping further, just last month 76 per cent of Sydney's water supply was extracted from the Shoalhaven River. One week later 82 per cent of Sydney's water supply was transferred from

the Shoalhaven River in order to avoid the media criticism that would have followed if dam levels had dropped to 25 per cent, which is what would have happened had the pumps not operated day and night transferring water from Tallowa Dam.

The Government has made a number of announcements about water. We remember the desalination plant proposal. Desalination is still on the cards. The Government will push the desalination button if things get really bad and dam levels drop further. The Government knows that it is politically unpalatable but the desalination option is still hovering in the background. Then, lo and behold, a few months ago the Government suddenly discovered some aquifers that it claimed were the solution to all Sydney's water problems. However, it was revealed later that the Government had known of the existence of the aquifers for 10 years but had done nothing about them. The Government has now gone back to the drawing board. We have gone round and round in circles, with the Minister for the Environment and the Premier struggling to find a solution to Sydney's water crisis—and it is a crisis. Sydney is using far more water than is coming into its catchment and from other sources. So the Government has returned to its plan to plunder the Shoalhaven River.

The issue of water sustainability in Sydney and its catchment has become an embarrassing debacle for the Government. The Government does not know what it is doing; it has no idea. But we in the Shoalhaven know one thing: the Government has the Shoalhaven River in its sights. It will be plundered and the river environment will be destroyed. I have been most surprised in this debate by the comments of the Minister for the Environment, the Premier and the Labor candidate for South Coast, who spoke about the issue this morning on radio. They have claimed that extracting this volume of water will be good for the environment. That is an absolute insult to the people of the South Coast, who are now very angry that an ignorant Minister for the Environment is making statements of that kind. I would not normally label the Minister "ignorant" but his claim that the transfers are good for the environment is an utter joke.

Water transfers from the Shoalhaven River have already proved damaging. There are problems along the lower reaches of the river that are a direct result of increased water transfers from the Shoalhaven to Sydney. Local prawn and oyster industries are already in trouble. Several groups, such as the Shoalhaven River Alliance, have been formed to monitor river water quality. They were united on the Tallowa Dam issue, they are united with me on this issue and we will unite with South Coast and Kiama residents to fight this scheme, which will damage the Shoalhaven River. When the Minister for the Environment claims that the transfers will be good for the environment he really means that they will be better than what he had in store for the Shoalhaven in 2004.

His 2004 plan is explained in some briefing notes. At the time I attended a meeting with the mayor of Shoalhaven City Council and John Gould, Director of the Shoalhaven Water Group, at which they expressed grave concerns that the Government was about to disallow pumping below the eightieth percentile. The ninety-fifth percentile had previously been the mark. In effect, the Government was about to close down the Shoalhaven. That is what the briefing notes say, and I invite the honourable member for Kiama to read them. The Government was about to institute a pumping regime that would have meant no new water for industry in the Shoalhaven. In fact, Shoalhaven residents could have woken one morning, turned on the tap and found that they had no water. The Government's current plan is better in comparison but that does not mean it is good for the environment. Of course it is not. Residents do not want what has happened with the Hawkesbury-Nepean scheme to be repeated in the Shoalhaven.

Unfortunately, the mayor, who I guess has been backed into a corner, is now saying that the Government's current plan is better than what was in store previously. We need to stop this Government in its tracks. It must start thinking seriously about reuse and recycling rather than spending money on media spin. It is all about media spin. In a beautiful advertisement with music playing in the background the Government told the residents of Sydney that it is recycling and has beautiful plans. Residents of Sydney should know that the truth is that the Government is not recycling. The water is all going to come from the Shoalhaven River—82 per cent in one week this month and 76 per cent the week before. The Government is relying completely on the Shoalhaven River. I invite the honourable member for Kiama, who has nothing of any substance whatsoever to say, to attend the rally on 17 September and to stand up for his constituents for a change.

**Mr MATT BROWN** (Kiama—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.40 a.m.]: Having listened to the shrill presentation from the honourable member for South Coast, I am pleased to put some facts before House. The Government and the community are tackling this important and challenging issue together. The honourable member for South Coast spoke for 10 minutes and did not announce one constructive policy initiative. The Opposition has absolutely no plan; it has no idea. No matter what the Government proposes all the Opposition



says is "No, no, no, no, no." That is why the honourable member for South Coast is losing a lot of credibility in her electorate, so much so that business has no confidence in her because she has nothing constructive to offer.

**Mr Andrew Constance:** Point of order—

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** I trust the honourable member for Bega will provide the standing order that he alleges has been breached.

**Mr Andrew Constance:** Standing Order 138, I think—relevance.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** Order! There is no point of order on relevance. The honourable member for Bega will resume his seat.

**Mr MATT BROWN:** We can see the quality of Coalition members; they do not even know the standing orders. The Government does not support this motion. If nothing else, the motion seeks to pre-empt the outcome of an extensive community consultation process that is now under way. I suggest that the Liberal Party start to listen to and work with the community. The honourable member for South Coast referred to recycling, and I will address that issue first. The motion asks the Government so seriously commit to water recycling and re-use. The Government has already done so. Recycling water is a cornerstone of the Government's 2006 Metropolitan Water Plan. Apparently, the honourable member for South Coast has not read the plan and wants to mislead this House and her community by shrill tactics and a lack of constructive contribution to debate.

In the past 10 years the amount of water recycled in Sydney has more than doubled. That is, the Government has more than doubled the amount of water that was being recycled by the former Coalition Government. The Coalition was not serious about recycling and it now claims, with crocodile tears, that it is serious. Notwithstanding the Government's success with recycling, much more needs to be done. That is precisely why the measures contained in the Government's plan will increase the current level of recycling more than fourfold, from 15 billion litres per year to approximately 70 billion litres a year in 2015. That will make Sydney one of the largest users of recycled water in Australia. The plan demonstrates that the Australian Labor Party puts its money where its mouth is. It supports recycling and has schemes under way to fulfil that commitment.

The Shoalhaven scheme, including the Tallowa Dam and other nearby dams, was designed and constructed in the 1970s by a Coalition government for precisely the purpose it is now being used. So when the Opposition comes in here crying crocodile tears, it conveniently forgets to mention that it was a former Coalition Government that built Tallowa Dam. Since that time the scheme has made an important contribution to the water supply needs of Sydney, the Shoalhaven, including Nowra, the Illawarra, the Southern Highlands and the Blue Mountains. Let me stress that the scheme is not only about Sydney; it is about securing the water supply for the people of the Illawarra, the Shoalhaven and the Southern Highlands.

The scheme has provided approximately 25 per cent of Sydney's water supply during the current drought. That is what it was designed and built to do in the 1970s. It is certainly less than the ridiculous 80 per cent figure bandied around by the Opposition in recent weeks. Whether or not transfers occur depends on water levels in the dam. Some weeks it has provided less than 25 per cent, sometimes it has provided more, but the average has been 25 per cent. Apparently, the honourable member for South Coast has forgotten what her colleague, the former Coalition shadow Minister responsible for Sydney Water, said on radio 2GB on 1 July 2004. The honourable member for Wakehurst said that the Government should "just get on with providing water from the Shoalhaven." That was Liberal policy and it has not been corrected since. So either the honourable member for South Coast does not agree with her former shadow Minister or she is spruiking to try to score political points. Who knows? In 2004 the Liberals said the Government should just get on and transfer water to Sydney from the Shoalhaven.

In consultation with the Shoalhaven, Illawarra and Southern Highlands communities, the Sydney Catchment Authority is examining operational changes to the Shoalhaven Transfer Scheme that could increase the long-term available water supply to greater Sydney by approximately 30 billion litres per year without raising the Tallowa Dam wall, about which there was a lot of community consultation. With the support of the local community I fought in this Parliament not to raise the Tallowa Dam wall. The community suggested time and time again that the pipeline should be built first. The Government listened to the local community because it has come up with constructive suggestions, unlike the honourable member for South Coast.

This outcome can be achieved whilst improving the health of the Shoalhaven River downstream of the dam and minimising the environmental impacts of water transfers across the Southern Highlands. The existing rules used by the Sydney Catchment Authority to operate the dam and transfer water to Sydney date from the 1970s and are less than ideal. They are, by the way, rules that were put in place when the Coalition built the dam. The Government is now looking to change those rules so that they improve the health of the Shoalhaven and Wingecarribee rivers. The Government does not think the current rules are in the best interests of the river. If the honourable member for South Coast wants the rules to remain the same, she should confront the communities.

For instance, the existing rules mean that water is transferred when the river is in low flow. So when the river is under stress the Sydney Catchment Authority is allowed to transfer water. The Government wants to change that to make sure that transfers occur during times of high flow, when the river is better able to cope, and its health will be better protected. That will allow a much larger environmental flow to be delivered down the Shoalhaven at the very time the river really needs it—during times of drought. All honourable members acknowledge that the river is under stress because these are times of drought. That stress is compounded by transfers during low flow, which is what the Government wants to change so that transfers are taken during times of high flow. It sounds sensible and logical; that is probably why the Liberals disagree with it. The current transfer rules make that difficult. The proposed new rules will guarantee that it occurs during times of high flow and so the river will be better protected. Councillor Greg Watson, the Mayor of Shoalhaven City and someone who is obviously more in touch with his local community than the honourable member for South Coast is, said on ABC Illawarra recently:

At the moment under the current drought regime of extraction, the water's taken when there's minimal flow in the river, and if you take the water, as they're planning to, during periods of high flow, then that will resolve the environmental issues that we've been up against, with increased salinity in the upper reaches of the river.

I could not have put it better myself. Quite succinctly, he said that these new rules will better protect the environment for the river. Anyone who reads the discussion paper, as the mayor obviously has, can understand the logic of the Government's proposal. If more water is transferred when the river is in high flow, and less when it is in low flow, the health of the river will improve. That will help to secure the water supply for approximately 5 million people, including those living in the Illawarra, the Shoalhaven and the Southern Highlands.

**Mrs Shelley Hancock:** Stand up for your constituents.

**Mr MATT BROWN:** The honourable member for South Coast interjects, "Stand up for your constituents." That is what I am doing. We want more water flowing down the river. The current proposal was made following the Government's decision to scrap plans to raise the Tallowa Dam wall. A number of community members suggested—in letters, at a community meeting in Kangaroo Valley, and through delegations I brought to Parliament to meet Ministers—that, rather than raise the dam wall, the Government should instead look at achieving the same outcome, but by using different means. They included changing the way the existing dam is operated. Clearly, such matters need to be carefully examined, especially from the viewpoint of how best to protect river health. There also needs to be extensive community consultation. That is precisely what the Government wants to do: consult extensively, not scaremonger or trying to score cheap political points. We certainly do not want to mislead our communities, something that is evident in the cynical approach of the honourable member for South Coast. Extensive consultation is now under way. I support that process, and I urge the House to reject the motion for what it is—rubbish.

**Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (The Hills) [11.50 a.m.]:** I strongly support the motion moved by the honourable member for South Coast. I am very concerned about what is happening to the Shoalhaven. The Government could not get right what it was doing with the Hawkesbury, and it destroyed the Hawkesbury. For example, we have had 70 kilometres of salvinia weed infestation from Wallacia to Sackville in recent years because of the lack of environmental flows down the river. Now the Government is doing to the Shoalhaven what it has done to the Hawkesbury-Nepean. What really concerns me is the fact that the amount of water that the Government has been extracting from the Shoalhaven over the past six months is clearly unsustainable. The honourable member for Kiama said his constituents want a changed flow regime for the Shoalhaven. The residents of the Shoalhaven have had a changed flow regime. Over the past couple of months, but during this month in particular, up to 82 per cent of Sydney's water has come from the Shoalhaven. Indeed, Sydney dam levels would have fallen to as low as 25 per cent of capacity were it not for those transfers from the Shoalhaven.

The honourable member for Kiama spoke about the need for extensive consultation with the community. The discussion paper, which has just been released, was released after those extractions had taken place—after this enormous amount of water had been transferred from the Shoalhaven to the Hawkesbury! The local community was not amused by that. Terry Barratt, Chairman of the Shoalhaven River Alliance, was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 19 August. The article read:

"Overall, the river's natural flow is being reduced and the river's ecology will start to change dramatically," Mr Barratt said, noting that the river was already suffering from increased salinity, pollution, heavy concentrations of jellyfish and the death of native aquatic plants.

All of that is happening now. The Government talks about consultation, but it shuts the door after the horse has bolted. The honourable member for Kiama said the current rules are not the best for the river. The current rules, in essence, are not being obeyed. The amount of water that the Government is extracting from the Shoalhaven is being done almost under the table. It certainly has not been done in consultation with the community. The community did not get a look-in. The honourable member for Kiama said the Government wants to change the rules to ensure transfers are made when the river is in high flow, and that that would be better for the river. However, the latest plan that the Government has come up with—its fourth water plan in two years, by the way—is a magic pudding plan, because it allows the Shoalhaven to be sucked dry, as well as receiving increased environmental flows.

So, somehow or other, the Government is creating water that simply is not there. It is talking about extracting an additional 30 billion litres of water a year from the Shoalhaven. It is already taking 75 billion litres of water a year, so it intends increasing that to 105 billion litres—or 20 per cent of Sydney's water supply—permanently. Quite frankly, if it had said it was going to build Welcome Reef Dam, it would probably not be taking any more water from the Shoalhaven. That is how bad things are.

The Government talks about increasing the water supply to Sydney by pumping water from the Shoalhaven when Sydney's dam levels fall below 90 per cent of capacity. Do Labor members know what Sydney dam levels are at the moment? They are at 41 per cent. What would the levels be were it not for these massive transfers from the Shoalhaven? They would be at 25 per cent. I just do not know when this water will be transferred, or when these new rules come in. That is the big problem with the Government's approach to the whole Sydney water supply issue. It has failed over the past 11 years to provide adequately for Sydney's water supply, it has failed to provide for recycling and environmental flows, while sucking the Shoalhaven dry as well as destroying the Hawkesbury.

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE** (Bega) [11.55 a.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for South Coast. I would like to draw the attention of the House to the words of our esteemed Premier on this water issue. Quite frankly, he is more confused than is the honourable member for Kiama. The Premier was interviewed by Alan Jones on 8 February 2006, and during that interview he said in relation to aquifers:

If the dam levels got to 40% they would be the first defence in severe drought and we would draw on those. So the deep water that's available in the dams, that will come on line in August—

an interesting time frame—

that will take us to a 50% dam level. If we got to 40% we would access the groundwater and then at 30% the work that's been done on desalination, we would have to push the button.

So why on earth now, in August, has the Government announced that 30 billion litres will be taken from the Shoalhaven? The community is in touch with this issue, and the honourable member for Kiama knows that. They know full well that there have been modest water transfers from Tallowa Dam to Sydney. Those began in the late 1970s. However, the community does not like the Government doing things on the run, without explanation, without consultation. Consultation involves seeking the advice of and input from the community—not dictating to it the path that the honourable member for Kiama and the Premier are happy to go down. We now learn that a further 30 billion litres of water will be extracted from the Shoalhaven.

The Government totally misunderstands the impacts of its water extraction rate on the river's environmental flows and on water quality, and ultimately the health of the water in the Shoalhaven. I am concerned by what we hear from the likes of the Labor candidate for South Coast. He is making bizarre statements, such as, "We won't do anything to hurt the river." I am sorry, but you are hurting the river. Everyone can tell you that. In a desperate political move, in an attempt not to press the button on desalination, and realising it has a problem with the aquifers it proposes to extract even more water from the Shoalhaven—all to

avoid a political problem in Sydney! That the Labor candidate would drop clangers like that goes to show how inexperienced and incompetent the Labor Party is regarding water management in this State.

I note that the honourable member for Kiama was quick to suggest in the House that the mayor of Shoalhaven is very much in touch with his local community. We all know how close is the relationship between the honourable member for Kiama and the mayor of the Shoalhaven. But the mayor of Shoalhaven should answer a number of questions. One is: What deals is he extracting from this process? What dividend is there for the local community from the State Government extracting another 30 billion litres from the Shoalhaven River?

From what I hear, people are expressing concern about the temple and the gaol. If the Government is going to start reaping more water out of the Shoalhaven River it should put some fair dinkum dollars into the place to fix the Princes Highway and to fix local infrastructure. But instead the mayor of the Shoalhaven is behind closed doors with his great mate the honourable member for Kiama doing grubby deals. The community is entitled to ask these questions because, even though the Government is reaping 30 billion litres of additional water out of the Shoalhaven River, we have not seen any evidence of improved infrastructure in the Shoalhaven. The Premier is running around the State misleading communities and making statements that clearly show he has no idea what to do. The Government is seeking to alleviate its political problems in Sydney by reaping 30 billion litres of additional water out of the Shoalhaven River.

**Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK** (South Coast) [12.00 noon], in reply: I thank my colleague the honourable member for The Hills for his comments on extraction from water from the Shoalhaven River. As always, he is supportive of the constituents on the South Coast. He has visited the area on several occasions to talk about this issue. I also thank my colleague the honourable member for Bega for his attention to various statements made by the Premier and others, which undermine the arguments made by the honourable member for Kiama that the Government knows what it is talking about. The honourable member for Kiama asked about our policy when, clearly, the Government has no policy.

Since 2004 the Government has jumped from one policy to another. It has had this plan and that plan, but it has rejected and dumped this plan and that plan because each one has proved either politically unpopular or environmentally unsustainable. The Government has come full circle back to the Shoalhaven River, which was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that the Government always intended to pillage and plunder. The honourable member for Kiama had the hide to say that I should start listening to the community and know what the community wants. As I said this morning, many people have signed petitions against the Government's plan to extract more water from the Shoalhaven River.

**Mr Matt Brown:** Under duress.

**Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK:** "Under duress," he says. Gladly they have come to sign petitions! Gladly they stream in daily by the hundreds to express their anger at the Government. The honourable member for Kiama should take note of the editorial in the *Times*, which said:

Why should Shoalhaven residents sit idly by and allow our river to be destroyed to feed the greed of the city? Sydney has 11 dams, yet the abuse of this precious resource by Sydneysiders means their country cousins once again pay the price.

In this place the honourable member for Kiama is a voice for the Government, not for his constituents. He is not prepared to stand up for his constituents. He is not prepared to listen to his constituents. He said he was fighting for Tallowa Dam. Three public meetings were held, and I saw him briefly at only one of them. I attended all of them. I combined with my friends and colleagues in Kangaroo Valley to fight for Tallowa Dam. The honourable member for Kiama was not fighting as hard as he should have, nor was he listening.

**Mr Matt Brown:** I got the result.

**Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK:** He says he got the result. No, he did not. The Lake Yeronga task force will not be pleased to know that the honourable member for Kiama takes credit for that win. It fought and won that battle, no thanks to him. I am listening to the community. Another expert said that taking more water from the Shoalhaven River to satisfy Sydney's needs is just perpetuating an unsustainable use of the catchment. The Shoalhaven City Council Natural Resources and Flood Plain Manager, certainly an expert in the field, has expressed concern many times about the plan. He said that major river flows were essential to flush the river system, to boost water quality and habitats, to maintain the riverbanks and wetland vegetation, and to keep tidal entrances open. Yet again this morning the honourable member for Kiama said that another 30 billion litres a year on top of the 75 billion litres a year already being extracted is good for the environment! That is just an example of how the Government does not understand the people of the South Coast and how it is not listening to them.

The Government does not understand about environmental sustainability and water quality. It does not understand about the damage done from interbasin transfers from one river system to another. Clearly, it has not learned any lessons from the Nepean-Hawkesbury scheme. After two years of ducking and weaving on every policy announcement the Government has come back to the Shoalhaven River. It has two strategies: plunder the Shoalhaven River and the media spin that it is recycling. My motion was aimed at getting the Government serious about recycling, reuse and stormwater reclamation. The Government should not just talk about it, nor should it build tunnels that will entrench Sydney's reliance on the Shoalhaven River forever. That is what the Government is doing. The Shoalhaven River is the only answer the Government has.

**Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.**

**The House divided.**

*[In Division]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the Leader of The Nationals to order.

*[Interruption]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the Leader of The Nationals to order for the second time.

**Ayes, 35**

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Seaton
Mr Barr	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Cansdell	Mr McTaggart	Mr Souris
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr Stoner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr Tink
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Torbay
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

**Noes, 46**

Mr Amery	Mr Gaudry	Mr Orkopoulos
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Bartlett	Mr Greene	Mr Pearce
Ms Beamer	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Mr Black	Mr Hickey	Ms Saliba
Mr Brown	Mr Hunter	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Mr Chaytor	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr McBride	Mr Watkins
Mr Corrigan	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Ms Megarrity	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Daley	Mr Mills	Mr Ashton
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	Mr Martin
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	

**Question resolved in the negative.**

**Motion negatived.**

### AUSTRALIAN FLAGS ON POLICE VEHICLES

**Mr PETER DEBNAM** (Vaucluse—Leader of the Opposition) [12.15 p.m.]: I move:

That this House notes that a proposal to promote the flying of the Australian flag on New South Wales police vehicles on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day has been rejected by the Minister for Police.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to this motion today. It has been some time since I placed the matter on notice.

**Mr Paul McLeay**: It is one of your 200 policies.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM**: Yes, it is. The Minister for Police referred to in the motion is the Hon. Carl Scully. I placed the motion on notice some time ago because it was a matter of concern to me then, as it is now. Before I discuss the merits of the motion, I welcome to the gallery students from the Lindfield Public School, which I am informed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, is a great school. Some years ago I suggested to the police Minister, the Hon. Carl Scully, that we should embrace the Australian flag by attaching small Australian flags to the aerals of police vehicles. I suggested that we should purchase them and distribute them to local area commands for the purpose of police cars or trucks flying the flag every day and that, beyond that, and more importantly, police vehicles could fly the Australian flag on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

I thought the suggestion was straightforward and easy to implement. I know that it is cheap to buy a couple of thousand small flags and I could not see how it would be a problem. However, I was absolutely stunned when the Minister for Police said that he would not approve it. I asked myself which planet the Minister for Police was living on, but a check revealed that, lo and behold, the Minister for Police at an early stage wanted to change the flag. I then began to understand that the Labor Party and Carl Scully would simply not support flying the Australian flag on police vehicles. Here we go again!

Although I am pleased to inform the House that some police officers have taken it upon themselves to fly the Australian flag on police cars, the flags are not new. They have obviously been around for a while and have not been replaced from government stocks. This motion presents an opportunity for the Labor Party today to acknowledge that, albeit three years later, it accepts my proposal and will purchase a couple of thousand small Australian flags and fly them on police vehicles. How difficult is that? Why should we not do it? I have served in the Navy under the Australian flag. A number of Coalition members have served in the military under the Australian flag. We are very proud of the Australian flag. I know that Carl Scully wants to change the design of the flag, but I think his colleagues should veto that and instead support the motion.

On most government buildings throughout New South Wales, the Government does not insist on flying the Australian flag. If a flagpole falls down or fails in some way, the Government has not rushed to fix it and keep the flag flying, and that is a shame. It is a disgrace. The Australian community would not be very pleased with that at all or with this issue. The idea of flying Australian flags on police vehicles came from the police. I received an email from NSW Police saying, "How about getting a couple of thousand small Australian flags and flying them on police cars in New South Wales, especially on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day". I thought that was a great idea and I thought that the Minister for Police and the Labor Party would agree with me.

*[Interruption]*

Yes, support the Diggers, and support all the schoolchildren who wrap themselves in the Australian flag, which we saw happen at the Olympics and time and again at community events. It is a very simple thing to do. It would cost bikkies from the State budget, a very minor expense, to purchase those flags. But, no, the Minister for Police ruled it out. I did some research and found that the Minister for Police did not agree with the design of the Australian flag, he proposed to change it. I was very disappointed with that and, to some extent, I suppose that is the sort of image of the Minister the public has seen. That probably explains why the public disagrees with him.

I say to the Labor Government: let us get behind this; let us do this. It is simple. The Government could cut back on some of its expenses—just knock off a couple of its radio advertisements tomorrow morning. The Labor Government spends a couple of million dollars a week on political advertising at taxpayers' expense. It could take out two or three of its radio advertisements tomorrow morning and use that money to purchase

Australian flags for police vehicles. That would be the right thing to do for the police and for the people, and our flag would be flying.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** When John Howard cuts back the WorkChoices ads we will cut back ours, mate. Is that a deal?

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** I disagree with political advertising. Labor's ads are extraordinary. Labor is spending \$100 million of taxpayers' funds on Labor Party advertising, not only on television. It is spending a couple of million dollars a week.

**Mr Gerard Martin:** Follow the right protocol. You should know the flag protocols.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** I do. The honourable member for Bathurst wants to talk about flag protocols. I know what the flag protocols are, and he knows what political advertising is: a couple of million dollars a week on political advertising on every television station, except the ABC, and every radio station, in every newspaper not only in Sydney but across New South Wales. The Labor Party has spent so much of taxpayers' funds that currently some radio stations in Sydney are running its political ads back to back, paid for by taxpayers. I suggest the Labor Government take a few thousand dollars out of its advertising budget and buy some Australian flags—overrule the Minister for Police. He might not like the Australian flag, but let us overrule him and put the equivalent of the cost of a couple of radio advertisements towards buying Australian flags and give them to the police. The police will fly the flags not only on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day, but every day.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** Tim Priest can give a flag, you can donate your flag and I will donate mine.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** If the Labor Party votes against this motion, I probably will buy NSW Police the flags they need to put on their cars. I am very happy to put my money where my mouth is. Let us do that. Today the Labor Party has an opportunity, as it did three years ago when it did not overrule the current Minister for Police. Labor members should overrule him, say no; they could say they support the Australian flag and the police. The flags cost only a couple of dollars each.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** You are kite flying more than flag flying.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** The honourable member for East Hills might think this is a laughable issue. However, the police put the proposal to the Opposition. The police want to fly the flag, and the community wants to fly the flag. The Labor Party might not support this motion, but does the honourable member for East Hills support the Australian flag?

**Mr Alan Ashton:** I've got one in my office.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** Do you support it?

**Mr Alan Ashton:** You bet I do.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** Why does the Minister for Police not support it?

**Mr Alan Ashton:** He said it is up to the police—they can put one on if they want to.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** The Minister for Police does not support the Australian flag. How about overruling the Minister and voting for this motion?

**Ms Marianne Saliba:** That would suit you.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** It would suit the police.

**Ms Marianne Saliba:** The police could request it if they want it. Let the police do what they want.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** Why will the Government not pay for it? Take out some Labor Government radio advertising and pay for the flags, and we will put them on every police car. If the Labor Party votes down this motion today, I will pay for the flags.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** Good. You will pay for the whole lot? Good on you. I thought you were going to send all the cops out to arrest all the gangs with the Australian flag flying. Haven't you got any other policies?

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** All right, if the Government votes it down, I will pay for the flags. I want a commitment from the Labor Party that when I buy the flags, they will be given to the police and not to the Minister for Police, because we do not know what he will do with them. I want a commitment from the Government that if I buy the flags, they will be given to police. But the Government has a better option, and that is to vote for the motion today.

**Mr PAUL McLEAY** (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.25 p.m.]: The motion notes that the Minister for Police rejected this proposal. That is simply not the case and that is why I will not support the motion. It is based on an untruth. The motion suggests that the Minister for Police rejected a proposal to fly flags. The Minister made no such rejection. It is an operational issue. I note that in 2005 the Leader of the Opposition asked about the flying of Australian flags on police vehicles on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. At that time he was provided with an answer. His memory is poor. I can confirm that the flying of flags on police vehicles is an operational decision for NSW Police, but one that the Government does not and would not discourage.

The Leader of the Opposition continues to deliver nothing on policing policy. He refuses to supply even tacit acknowledgement that the New South Wales police force has achieved outstanding results in driving down crime across the State. In his speech in reply to the budget, he had 45 minutes in which he could outline his plans for policing in New South Wales. Did he announce any new policing policies? Did he outline that if in government his party would continue to equip the New South Wales police force with the powers and resources to fight crime? No. All the people got was deafening silence, a policy vacuum that makes a mockery of his claims to being the alternative premier.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: The motion is specific, it is about the flying of the Australian flag on police vehicles on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day—very significant, much revered and reverent days.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** What is your point of order?

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** The Parliamentary Secretary is not talking about the issue. He has gone right outside the leave of the motion. I know from past rulings you have given that you will direct him to come back and speak specifically to that issue.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! I am sure the Parliamentary Secretary is getting to the point. The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Madam Acting-Speaker, he has been speaking for 2½ minutes and has not addressed that issue.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The Parliamentary Secretary has the call.

**Mr PAUL McLEAY:** It was one of my opening lines. I have been talking about it for the last two minutes.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** So you admit that you are not talking about Australian flags flying on police cars on those most revered days?

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

**Mr PAUL McLEAY:** That is another lie from the Leader of the Opposition. It is interesting that just earlier this month the Leader of the Opposition was in my electorate at Sutherland police station calling the Commissioner of Police a clown. How is that for absolute hypocrisy?

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: The only clown here now is the honourable member for Heathcote, who is not talking to the motion before the House. Either there are forms of the House—



**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Wakehurst knows better than that. The Parliamentary Secretary has the call.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** So, you are going to allow him to speak outside the motion? Is that the standard for all of us now?

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! A fair amount of latitude is allowed in these debates. There is no point of order.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** So we are going to be able to speak outside the leave of the motion?

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The Parliamentary Secretary has the call. The honourable member for Wakehurst will have an opportunity to speak if he wishes to do so. He must resume his seat.

**Mr PAUL McLEAY:** Instead of engaging in a genuine debate about a whole range of issues affecting law and order, the Leader of the Opposition wants to discuss flags. Whilst we acknowledge that that issue is important, we also know that the people of New South Wales deserve better and expect more from the Coalition. I suppose we should be relieved, because we know that if he was not mouthing erroneous platitudes about this issue, the Leader of the Opposition would just fall back on his usual *modus operandi*—that is, attacking the hard-working Commissioner of Police, Ken Moroney, and undermining the achievements of the dedicated men and women of the New South Wales police force.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** Point of order: We have had an achievement in that, for 10 seconds, the Parliamentary Secretary referred to the substantive part of the motion. The point here, with due regard, is respect or lack of it for the standing orders. I understand the pressures that you are placed under, but this is the most wilful disregard of the limits of a debate—

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** Your action in refusing to stand up for the Australian flag does you no good with your—

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! I will not debate this matter with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. There is no point of order.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** It does you no good with your voters. It does you no good. For him to describe the motion as "erroneous platitudes" displays the disdain of the honourable member for Heathcote for the Australian flag—

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Parliamentary Secretary has the call.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** I am surprised you are supporting him in that. I ask that you support the flag, Madam Acting-Speaker.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition should take his point of order on the Parliamentary Secretary. The Parliamentary Secretary may resume his speech.

**Mr PAUL McLEAY:** This Government offers its total support to the New South Wales police force. We are committed to giving our front-line police officers the resources and powers they need to drive down crime. That is why we are backing NSW Police with record funding in this year's budget. The Treasurer announced that the police budget would increase by \$160 million, or 7.9 per cent, in 2006-07, more than twice the rate of inflation, to a record \$2.2 billion. The crime figures show that our approach is working. The Government has not fallen into complacency, however. The Premier recently announced that 750 additional police officers would be drafted into the force, which will increase our authorised strength to a record 15,206 officers.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: I do not know how many times we have to raise this issue, but the motion is very clear and it is very limited.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Standing Order 138 requires that whatever he says is relevant to this motion, Madam Acting-Speaker, and what you are doing is allowing him to broad range—

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. The Parliamentary Secretary may continue.

**Mr PAUL McLEAY:** Once again, for the convenience of those members opposite who were not in the Chamber to hear the majority of what I said: In 2005 the Leader of the Opposition asked about flying the Australian flag on police vehicles on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. He was provided with an answer at the time. I remind him of that and confirm that the flying of flags on police vehicles is an operational decision for NSW Police, but something that the Government would not and does not discourage. The motion suggests that the Minister for Police rejected the application, and that simply is not true. The Minister the Police did no such thing. For the Leader of the Opposition to base a motion on a lie demonstrates his contempt for the police service and for this Parliament.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about respecting standing orders, having moved a motion based on an untruth. That is something we will debate and something that exposes him as the fraud he is. The Leader of the Opposition continues his baseless smear campaign and his pathetic attacks not only on the standing orders of this House but also on the police. He will never master the talent and policy vacuum that exists on that side of the Chamber when it comes to policing policy. This Government stands proudly by its support for this State's front-line police and for the commissioner. We respect them and will give them the powers and the funding to do their job, because that is having a real effect on crime.

**Mr STEVEN PRINGLE (Hawkesbury)** [12.34 p.m.]: How appropriate it is that, after 2½ years of waiting, this motion comes on for debate today. Next Sunday, Father's Day, 3 September, is also National Flag Day, but that seems to have been lost on Government members. Sunday is National Flag Day. It is also appropriate that the Leader of the Opposition should have moved this motion today. One of his predecessors, Lieutenant Colonel Murray Robson, was the member for Vaucluse from 1936 until 1957. He also was a significant member of the Australian Army. Lieutenant Colonel Murray Robson commanded the 2nd/31st Battalion, which accepted the surrender of the Japanese Imperial Forces at Bandjermasin. At the surrender ceremony the Australian flag was raised alongside the Dutch and American flags. The Leader of the Opposition has carried on the proud tradition of supporting the flying of the Australian flag.

It is important to contrast what the Federal Government does to encourage the flying of the Australian flag. The Federal Government provides free flagpoles to schools throughout New South Wales and Federal parliamentarians are given free flagpoles. The Federal Government also provides members of Parliament with a simple method for distributing flags to schools and other community organisations. Contrast that with what this Government does and the difficulties involved in supplying a New South Wales flag. Honourable members will note the presence of this State's flag on the wall in this Chamber.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** Point of order: Are any standing orders applying during this debate, or does it not suit you to stand up for the flag?

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The honourable member for Hawkesbury may continue.

**Mr STEVEN PRINGLE:** There are some first-term members opposite, just like me. No doubt when they were first elected they wanted to promote the New South Wales flag. They might have approached the protocol branch of the Premier's Department—as I did—and said, "Could I have 20 or 50 flags to hand out when a school or a community group asks for a flag?" What is the rigmarole, the bureaucratic nonsense that the Government insists on? You have to have a letter or an email from the organisation and you have to send that off to the Premier's Department. It probably costs \$50 or \$100 to get each flag to your office so you can hand it out. That is nonsense! It is typical bureaucratic nonsense! This Government wastes taxpayers' money over and over again.

**Mr Gerard Martin:** Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The motion refers to the Australian flag being flown on police vehicles on certain days. Our friend is talking about anything other than that. Really, we want him to come out of the closet. He wants to fly the Union Jack on our police cars—then he might get your preselection.

**Mr STEVEN PRINGLE:** Come on, just settle down here!

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! I have not ruled on the point of order. The honourable member for Hawkesbury may continue because these debates are wide ranging; we are flexible in this House.

**Mr STEVEN PRINGLE:** The point I was attempting to make was that we encourage the flying of the flag. I have no doubt that when the Coalition is elected to office next year it will be far simpler to hand out the New South Wales flag. It will be far easier for government departments to fly the flag. That is what this is all about. The Opposition encourages the flying of the Australian flag. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr RICHARD AMERY** (Mount Druitt) [12.39 p.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Secretary in opposing the motion before the House.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** Are you for the flag or against it?

**Mr RICHARD AMERY:** I will come to that. We have nothing against the proposition of displaying Australian flags on police vehicles on occasion. However, it is a nonsense for the Parliament of New South Wales—the oldest Parliament in Australia—to pass a motion instructing the police to display flags on police vehicles on certain days. The Parliamentary Secretary was correct when he said it was an operational matter. As to the flag, I think the Australian flag is wonderful. It represents our history and our place in the world and I think it should stay. If we ever have a referendum on changing our flag I will vote to retain our existing flag.

This motion is a nonsense because the decision by police to display the flag is an operational matter. We have all seen how police vehicles are used, as recommended by the protocol department, during royal visits, papal visits or when the Governor attends official functions. If it is intended that the vehicles perform that role all day the police may decide to display the Australian flag or some other decoration on them. On Anzac Day at the Rooty Hill RSL club the police provide an excellent service controlling traffic. They are part of the community march and officers are present for the laying of the wreaths. However, about 1½ hours later they are back on the beat, patrolling and so on.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** So they can't fly the flag for the rest of the day?

**Mr RICHARD AMERY:** That would be great! The honourable member for Wakehurst believes police vehicles should fly the flag for the rest of the day. Picture this: Officers have just left the RSL club, where everybody is inside enjoying breakfast or morning tea, and they are called to respond urgently to an incident. So there they are in their vehicle, flying down the Great Western Highway at 100 miles an hour, with the Australian flag flapping in the wind. How stupid is this motion, which calls upon the Parliament to dictate to police when and where they should display the Australian flag? It is absurd and embarrassing that we should tell the police when they should fly the flag and when they should not.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order—

**Mr RICHARD AMERY:** I have concluded my comments. The Parliamentary Secretary is 100 per cent correct: Let the police decide when they should fly the Australian flag and when it is not appropriate to do so.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** I place on record the fact that I rather like the idea of flags being displayed on police vehicles on Australia Day, Remembrance Day and Anzac Day. If the police have an operational reason not to use them it should be left to their discretion.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! That is not a valid point of order. The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS** (Lane Cove) [12.43 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I stand shoulder to shoulder with my Coalition colleagues in supporting the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. The motion supports the police and promotes the flying of the Australian flag on New South Wales police vehicles on Australia Day, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. It says a lot about the loathing that members of the Labor Party have for themselves and for the nation as a whole that they have rejected the simple and patriotic suggestion of flying small Australian flags on police cars on national days. Despite the fact that, like the former Premier, the current Premier always has the Australian flag in the background when conducting his press conferences from Governor Macquarie Tower—in a blatant and shameless attempt to copy John Howard—this Government remains anti the flag, anti the Australian Constitution and anti anything that it perceives as being a threat to its ideology, in which the Australian people do not feature, much less the wellbeing and reputation of the New South Wales police force.

What this Government fails to realise—and it is its fault—is that our police force is under siege. It is denied funds and resources and it is stretched to the limit. Here and now we have a chance not only to empower our national symbols but to make it clear that being Australian goes hand in hand with justice and the rule of law. We have an opportunity to remind those who would defy or attack the character of those selfless, hardworking men and women that the police are a much loved and respected part of our Australian culture. Just over 10 years ago, before the Howard Government came to power federally, the flag was under attack. Second-rate mediocrities on the Left and self-proclaimed "intellectuals" fed the public the line that the Australian flag was not "our flag" and was not an appropriate symbol for our nation. It was all part of a scheme by many—including, prominently, the so-called "Australian" Labor Party—to rubbish and break down our national identity and democracy by attacking first the symbols and then the Constitution of Australia.

But, despite their pontifications, the Australian flag has not been held in such high esteem since the Second World War—largely thanks to the proud and progressive policies of the Federal Government that remind Australians of the importance of their flag. It is a much-loved symbol of our nation and features prominently at national events, sporting events—

**Mr Alan Ashton:** Point of order: The honourable member for Lane Cove is clearly not debating the substantive motion before the House, which calls on Parliament to force police to fly the Australian flag on their vehicles on three days of the year. The honourable member is trying to whip up debate about the flag, the Australian Labor Party, referendums and the monarchy.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** It is about that.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** No, it is not. Debate should be limited to the substance of the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Members are limited as to how much they can stray from debating the motion before the House. I ask you to draw the honourable member for Lane Cove back to the terms of the motion.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! I ask the honourable member for Lane Cove to restrict his remarks to the motion before the House.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** The Australian flag is a much-loved symbol of our nation, and features prominently at national events, sporting events and around the world wherever our armed forces fight for freedom and democracy. It is also a symbol of our stable society and the rule of law. But the Labor Government quietly quashes this idea in the same way as it attacks or covers up any attempt to use the symbols of State to reinforce symbols of authority—in this case, the police—and it does so without any reference to the people of New South Wales.

The Government needs to wake up. We have all seen the Australian flag flying at prominent national events. We saw last Anzac Day the many flags carried by spectators and we have seen the number of flags that fly on Australia Day. What is wrong with showing pride in our flag? What is wrong with paying our respects to those who made the ultimate sacrifice in war by flying the Australian flag from police cars on Anzac Day? We must not forget that the police are an integral and much-loved part of Anzac Day. Do not forget either that many former members of the military have entered the police force to continue to serve their community and their nation. Year after year, I see police men and women helping elderly Diggers walk in the parade. That engenders a wonderful sense of community and shared values that would be encapsulated and rightly symbolised by the flying of the Australian flag from police cars on Anzac Day.

Police who fly the flag on Anzac Day would be showing their respect for the Diggers. The police, who do their duty protecting law and order, would be showing solidarity with those who did their duty in defence of freedom and justice. Do any members on the Government benches have the gumption to stand up in support of the police, to stand up in support of the Australian people, to defy their party theology and to show that they have not only backbone but pride in our nation and in the police force that protects our streets? It is time the Government fell into line with the people of New South Wales, got behind the police force and gave them some credit. It is time to get behind our diggers and all those who exalt our national symbols.

**Mr GERARD MARTIN** (Bathurst) [12.48 p.m.]: I speak for all my colleagues on this side of the House when I say that we have the greatest respect for the Australian flag and all the protocols that go with it. As Labor members have said, this is a most dishonest motion from the Leader of the Opposition. The Minister for Police dealt with this matter long ago: New South Wales police have the operational discretion to decide when and where it is appropriate to display the Australian flag. I do not know whether the honourable member for Lane Cove drew from his experiences thumping out dispatches on the old Remington typewriter in Bougainville some years ago. I do not know whether those dispatches carried images of the Australian flag.

The Government has the greatest respect for protocols surrounding the displaying of both the Australian flag and our New South Wales flag, which is very similar to our national flag. I think the honourable member for Hawkesbury and the honourable member for Lane Cove would like us to fly the Union Jack instead of the Australian flag. The honourable member for Lane Cove would certainly like to see that. I give credit to the honourable member for Lane Cove for his passion in regard to research, with all those little minions of typists. I note he read every word he said. He said nothing from the heart. The honourable member for Mount Druitt and the other Government members who contributed to the debate spoke from their heart, as we do when we talk about the Australian flag. There is a sinister side to this motion: it is part of the Leader of the Opposition's racist little agenda.

**Mr Anthony Roberts:** Point of order: What have you got against the Diggers? What have you got against supporting the blokes on Anzac Day?

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The honourable member for Lane Cove must direct his remarks to me. What is the point of order?

**Mr Anthony Roberts:** What has the honourable member for Bathurst got against Diggers and against police supporting them on Anzac Day?

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! That is not a point of order. It is a question.

*[Interruption]*

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! I ask the honourable member for Bathurst to take care with his language.

**Mr GERARD MARTIN:** I will. I will respect that ruling. I am not here to boast about my record as a local member on Anzac Day and recently at the Long Tan celebration at Bathurst, at which I was one of the guest speakers. I attend as many Anzac Day services in my electorate as possible, from Rockley to Tarana to Sodwalls to Bathurst and to Lithgow. I show the greatest reverence. The Leader of the Opposition should not tell us that we do not respect the Diggers. This motion is not about that; it is about someone on the other side of the House making a cheap use of the Australian flag to try to politically embarrass people.

The Government is dedicated to the Australian flag, but it will not play cheap racist games like the Leader of the Opposition. He should crawl in the gutter with his racist agenda and see how he ends up. He should not prostitute the Australian flag. This motion has nothing to do with flying flags on certain days; it is just the Leader of the Opposition throwing it in there for the rednecks. This Government wholeheartedly supports the Australian flag. The Minister has put on record that if Ken Moroney and his troops want to fly the Australian flag operationally they can. This is another grubby effort from the Coalition.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM** (Vaucluse—Leader of the Opposition) [12.52 p.m.], in reply: The honourable member for Bathurst should not leave the Chamber; he should stay here. The honourable member for Bathurst just called me a racist for proposing to buy Australian flags for New South Wales Police. He has scurried away

because he knows that he has not only disgraced himself but he has disgraced this Parliament. The honourable member for Bathurst has just returned to the Chamber.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The honourable member for Bathurst will come to order.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** Let us understand what the Australian Labor Party is all about. Let us understand political correctness and those screaming left-wingers. Four minutes ago the honourable member for Bathurst said that because I want to use taxpayers' funds to buy Australian flags for police I am a racist. He is an absolute disgrace. I know the honourable member for East Hills does not like the Australian flag. I know the Minister for Police does not like the Australian flag.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** Point of order: I have already stated that I fully support the Australian flag. My father and grandfather fought under the Australian flag. I have a flag in my office and another one on the front window of my office. The Leader of the Opposition should not say that I do not support the Australian flag. He is trying to belittle the Australian flag for a cheap attempt to get votes. He thinks so many people take orders from people such as Alan Jones, Lyenko Urbanchich and David Clarke.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! The honourable member for East Hills has made his point. The Leader of the Opposition may continue.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** The honourable member for East Hills is sitting next to the honourable member for Bathurst, who called me a racist because I want to promote the Australian flag. The Opposition simply asks the Labor Government to buy a couple of thousand small Australian flags and encourage the flying of those flags on police vehicles. For that proposal the honourable member for Bathurst called me a racist. The honourable member for East Hills pretends to embrace the Australian flag. It is clearly still Labor Party policy to change the flag, is it not? It is still on your platform to change the flag? It is. That is why you denigrate me because I want to promote the Australian flag.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! I remind the Leader of the Opposition that his remarks should be addressed to the Chair.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** Yes, I am very happy to do that. During the debate one of the members of the Government suggested that the Opposition should say something about its policy on policing, and I agree. I will quickly run through the points that are on my web site, [www.peterdebnam.com.au](http://www.peterdebnam.com.au).

**Mr Paul McLeay:** Point of order: My point of order is relevance. I ask you to draw the Leader of the Opposition back to the leave of the motion.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** I am replying to his points. We will legislate to introduce mandatory life sentences for those convicted of the murder of police. We will reinstate more than 600 police slashed by Labor and especially boost numbers in the highway patrol, public transport and criminal investigation. We will ensure the authorised police strength is a minimum, not an average. We will legislate to officially protect the name "NSW Police Force". We will re-empower police in relation to arrest and search with an urgent reform of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act. We will strengthen police powers in relation to offensive language and conduct with the aim of raising the standards of public decency.

We will establish a high-level working group, including former senior operational police officers, to review current police paperwork requirements with the objective of reducing paperwork by 75 per cent for frontline police. The working group will be required to report its recommendations by 30 June 2007. We will strengthen the graffiti task force and strengthen related penalties and powers of magistrates. We will strengthen the role of the Judicial Commission to make judges and magistrates more accountable to the community.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews):** Order! I call Government members to order.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** We will legislate to reduce to one warning and one caution for young offenders to get rid of Labor's unlimited warnings and three cautions. We will change centralised local area commands to locally led, locally based policing. I advise anyone who wants to read through the policing policies that they are on my web site, [www.peterdebnam.com.au](http://www.peterdebnam.com.au). Today is simply about whether the Government supports the flag.

**Mr Paul McLeay:** Point of order: I draw your attention to the use of a prop.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** This is the Australian flag. We suggest we get very small flags for police cars.  
[Time expired.]

**Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.**

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 31**

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejikian	Mr Humpherson	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Mr Constance	Mr McTaggart	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Torbay
Mr Draper	Mr Page	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Seaton	Mr Maguire

**Noes, 51**

Ms Allan	Mr Gibson	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hickey	Ms Saliba
Mr Black	Mr Hunter	Mr Sartor
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Scully
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Mr Chaytor	Mr McBride	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr McLeay	Mr Watkins
Mr Corrigan	Ms Meagher	Mr West
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Whan
Mr Daley	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Ms D'Amore	Ms Moore	
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	
Mrs Fardell	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Mr Oakeshott	Mr Ashton
Mr Gaudry	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Martin

**Question resolved in the negative.**

**Motion negatived.**

[Mr Speaker left the chair at 1.05 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

**MINISTRY**

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** I inform the House that in the absence of the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation, Minister for Women, and Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development, the Minister for Local Government will answer questions on her behalf.

## PETITIONS

### **Hornsby and Berowra Train Station Parking Facilities**

Petition requesting adequate commuter parking facilities at Hornsby and Berowra train stations, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

### **CountryLink Rail Services**

Petitions opposing the abolition of CountryLink rail services and their replacement with bus services in rural and regional New South Wales, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood** and **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

### **Bus Service 300**

Petition requesting improved bus services including expansion of the 300 series bus service to adequately serve the inner city, particularly during peak-hour travel, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

### **Pets on Public Transport**

Petition requesting that pets be allowed on public transport, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

### **Bus Services 326 and 327**

Petition asking that the Government urgently reinstate the former timetables of bus services 326 and 327, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

### **Whale Protection in Australian Waters**

Petition calling for protection of whales in Australian waters, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

### **Gardens of Stone Reserve**

Petition requesting the reservation of the Gardens of Stone stage two park proposal to preserve the area's outstanding scenic, historic, scientific and recreational value, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

### **Rural and Regional Police Resources**

Petition calling upon the Iemma Government to allocate more police resources to rural and regional communities throughout New South Wales, received from **Mr Adrian Piccoli**.

### **Police Resources**

Petition requesting increased police resources for New South Wales, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

### **School Students Intellectual Disability Support Unit Classes**

Petition requesting that support unit classes be maintained for students with intellectual disabilities, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

### **Colo High School Airconditioning**

Petition requesting the installation of airconditioning in all classrooms and the library of Colo High School, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

### **Parkinson's Disease Funding**

Petition requesting funding for Parkinson's-specific support services for people living with Parkinson's disease, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.



**Breast Screening Funding**

Petition requesting funding for BreastScreen NSW, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

**Newstan-Awaba Mines Land Protection**

Petition requesting that the land west of the existing Awaba underground mine be included in the Hunter Regional Conservation Plan and opposing open-cut mining in the area, received from **Mr Jeff Hunter**.

**Recreational Fishing**

Petitions opposing any restrictions on recreational fishing in the mid North Coast waters, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner** and **Mr John Turner**.

**CSR Quarry, Hornsby**

Petition requesting a public inquiry into Hornsby Shire Council's acquisition of CSR Quarry in Hornsby, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

**East Richmond Railway Station Car Park Access**

Petition requesting cancellation of fines imposed on passengers using the East Richmond railway station level crossing to gain access to the car park, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

**Bells Line of Road**

Petition requesting improvements to sign posting, sealing of road shoulders, and removal of dead and overhanging foliage on the Bells Line of Road, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

**Old Northern and New Line Roads Strategic Route Development Study**

Petition requesting funding for implementation of the Old Northern and New Line roads strategic route development study, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

**Cross City Tunnel**

Petition requesting government decisions concerning the Cross City Tunnel be based on the public interest, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

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**JOHN LEWTHWAITE PAROLE**

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Police. In 1999 the Minister said:

I share the disappointment about the release of Lewthwaite. For those who are not aware, I am not the Attorney General, the Minister for Police or the Minister for Corrective Services.

Now that he is the Minister for Police, what will he do to lock up this sick killer?

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** The question I was asked yesterday was quite extraordinary. There is no end to the hypocrisy of those opposite. As I have said on a few occasions, if hypocrisy were a crime I would be happy to make a citizen's arrest and all of them would be rounded up and locked up. Yesterday we saw an appalling performance by those opposite. They tried to pretend that somehow they were not responsible for giving John Lewthwaite the key to his cell door, but they gave it to him. I invite the newer members of Parliament on both sides of the House to research section 13A of the Sentencing Act 1989. John Lewthwaite was sentenced to life imprisonment. Look at John Dowd's speech.

**Mr Ian Armstrong:** Some 11 years in government, Carl. Where have you been for the last 11 years?

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** The honourable member for Lachlan was a Minister at the time. I urge honourable members to look at the speech of Attorney General John Dowd, who said:

We want to introduce truth in sentencing. We want to make life mean life.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** Point of order—

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** He does not like this, does he?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister will resume his seat.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** You are the Minister for Police.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** He should be ashamed of himself. He should apologise. He is disgraceful.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister will resume his seat.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** You can get off your backside and do something.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition will state his point of order.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** My point of order is relevance. The Minister was asked a question about his speech. We are talking about his speech in 1999.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The Minister is responding to the question and, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, the House cannot direct the way in which the Minister responds to the question. The Minister has the call.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** It is important that the House knows what the Coalition Attorney General said, not in relation to prospective terms of life means life, but in relation to people who are in gaol serving life sentences. He said in this House, standing where I stand now, that they had an expectation that at some time they might get out. He said that they are entitled to have that expectation met. He said that the Coalition Government did not want to overly disadvantage them. It is appalling. The attitude of the Coalition in government to prisoners serving life sentences was: the poor little snookums.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** Point of order—

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** They expect to get out, and they ought to be allowed out.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition has taken a point of order.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** That is what the Coalition Attorney General said in this House when in government.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** They did have an expectation. Under the Labor Party it was 12 years.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Again I remind the Leader of the Opposition that this is question time. It is not a debate.

**Mr Peter Debnam:** In fact, you let him out on day release and he escaped. You let him out a couple of times. Now put him back.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition well knows that he can raise these matters in a notice of motion or in debate. This is not a debate; it is question time.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** The Coalition in government said, not on the issue generally but on this individual in particular, that he and others like him should not be disadvantaged; they should not have their expectations diminished; they are entitled to have life not mean life.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for North Shore will cease calling out.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** They ought to have their expectations met; they ought to be able to go back to court to get a fixed-term sentence. But it gets worse. That is only the Coalition's first hypocrisy. I am sure honourable members would like to hear the second hypocrisy. Yesterday I was asked why neighbours and residents surrounding these types of people were not informed of their presence, and I informed the House, appropriately I believe, that although I would be sympathetic to that approach and that it would be terrific to humiliate and embarrass them, all the records in the United States of America show that such an approach results in enormous non-compliance.

These characters disappear into the community and the police do not know where they are. Such an approach also encourages vigilantes, which is a secondary reason not to encourage it. But the most important thing is to make sure that police can monitor them, and that we know where they are, where they live and where they work. Hence I get to the second hypocrisy. Guess what the Hon. Michael Gallacher and the honourable member for Epping had to say about this. Would honourable members like to hear about it? I am embarrassed about the standard of the Opposition's approach. In the context of yesterday's suggestion by the Leader of the Opposition about what the Government should implement, this is what the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council said yesterday:

The Opposition places on record the strongest reservations about an open Megan's law approach, particularly given the strong recommendations by the royal commission.

In this House we all love Tinky and we will miss him when he has gone. But as if the Hon. Michael Gallacher comments were not enough, this is what the honourable member for Epping said:

I put on record that I have the strongest reservations about an open Megan's law approach particularly because the royal commission has made strong recommendations in this regard that weigh very heavily with us.

That makes two lots of hypocrisy. How many times do I have to say that it was because of the Coalition in government that Gwen Hanns asked me never to let this character, Lewthwaite, out. Members of the Coalition let him out. Shame on them!

**Mr Peter Debnam:** Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The man referred to his child.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition again demonstrates his inadequate understanding of the standing orders and his inadequate knowledge of how to conduct himself properly in the Chamber.

### **RANDOM ROADSIDE DRUG TESTING**

**Mr ALLAN SHEARAN:** My question without notice is addressed to the Premier. What is the latest information on the Government's plans to introduce random roadside drug testing?

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** The Government is introducing tough new random drug testing laws to target motorists who use drugs and then drive. We want to take drug-addled drivers out from behind the wheel, keep them off the roads and take away the risk that their deadly behaviour poses to the rest of us. Drug driving equals death: it is that simple. Too often people think that it is a harmless risk, that they will not be caught, or that it does not matter. A recent study on drug driving commissioned by the Roads and Traffic Authority found that 43 per cent of drug users in New South Wales admitted to driving while affected by drugs. Seven in 10 of those drug users thought that they could get away with it. A quarter of all drivers killed on the roads in New South Wales in 1997 and 1998 were drug affected.

The Government is about giving the police the laws, powers, resources and support they need to drive down crime. We are about putting more police on the streets and building on the recent police results that have made our communities safer for all. That is why, for the first time in New South Wales, police will be able to randomly drug test motorists at the roadside. In addition, any driver, rider or supervising driver who is involved in a fatal crash will undergo compulsory blood testing for drugs as well as alcohol, regardless—and this is an important point—of whether or not they go to the hospital.

Specially trained police will conduct on-the-spot saliva tests by the use of portable drug-screening machines. The random roadside drug tests will be used to detect speed, cannabis and ecstasy. The police will be

able to tell within minutes if a driver has taken any of the detectable substances. Under these tough new laws, anyone found to be drug driving in New South Wales will face hefty court penalties. First-time offenders can be fined up to \$1,100 and have their licence cancelled for three to six months. Repeat offenders will be slugged with a \$2,200 fine and can have their licence cancelled immediately. Police can also charge motorists with offensive driving under the influence of drugs. The offence carries penalties of nine months gaol and unlimited licence disqualification. The Government is giving police the power to test randomly for drugs in the same way as they test hundreds of thousands of drivers every year for alcohol.

Police will target the heavy vehicle industry as well as roads and locations where drug intelligence indicates there may be a problem. In Victoria, police have tested more than 20,000 drivers since their random roadside drug testing began, with 287 caught drivers being tested and confirmed as positive to cannabis. The Government has delivered record numbers of police and has committed itself to appointing another 750 new officers for the front line. We will target all areas of crime in public safety by using this record level of resources, backed by the nation's toughest powers and the world's best equipment.

### **DROUGHT TRANSPORT SUBSIDIES**

**Mr ANDREW STONER:** My question is directed to the Premier. With 93 per cent of the State now drought declared, does he understand that droughts are related to weather patterns, not political cycles?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of The Nationals will be heard in silence.

**Mr ANDREW STONER:** For the benefit of the peanut gallery I repeat: Does the Premier understand that droughts are related to weather patterns, not political cycles? If so, will he extend drought transport subsidies until the drought ends, not until Parliament ends in November and he thinks he will be free from public scrutiny?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier has the call. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will contain his enthusiasm.

**Mr Richard Amery:** Another Mark Vaile! He gets the discovery award.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** Yes, Mark Vaile.

**Mr Peter Black:** Perhaps a new John Cobb?

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** We might have a few words to say later about the removal of exceptional circumstances assistance.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Murray-Darling to order.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** I am pleased to respond to the question asked by the Leader of The Nationals. This is the first rural question he has asked in quite some time, so I am pleased to respond. It is good to receive a question from him on rural matters as opposed to city infrastructure questions from the Sydney-centric member of The Nationals. Low rainfall and cold weather across the State have resulted in 93 per cent of New South Wales being drought declared.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** Point of order: We know the Premier is very busy on re-election efforts—

**Mr SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** The Leader of the Nationals asked him a question yesterday about the Hunter-New England area. That is not in the city; it is in the country.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is no point of order. The Premier has the call.

*[Interruption]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** He has a fixation with Sydney Water and city infrastructure. As I said, low rainfall and cold weather across the State resulted in 93 per cent of New South Wales being drought declared in August, and 28 per cent of New South Wales remains in a marginal condition, with only 10 per cent of the State now rated as satisfactory. For the benefit of the Leader of The Nationals, I point out that the Government has stood by farmers since the drought began in 2002 and has provided over \$215 million in assistance since then. To refresh his memory I point out that in May the Government announced it would continue the 50 per cent drought transport subsidies in currently eligible areas until the end of August 2006 and reintroduce the 50 per cent drought transport subsidy in all other areas of the State from 1 May 2006 until the end of August 2006.

**Mr Andrew Stoner:** Point of order: On a point of relevance, the transport subsidy has been shut down for two months.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of The Nationals seems to be following the tendency of the Leader of the Opposition to treat question time as a debate. I again remind members that question time is a question and answer session, not a debate.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** The third point extends the employment of eight drought support workers until the end of the year. The Government was proud to announce at estimates hearings on Monday night that it has again extended the drought subsidies for another three months. We will continue to monitor and review drought assistance measures to ensure they meet the needs of farming communities. That is more than I can say about the withdrawal of exceptional circumstances support in the north and north-western area by the Coalition's Federal colleagues. How about the Coalition taking a stand for New South Wales farmers and pushing the case that the Government is pushing for the Federal Government to review the withdrawal of exceptional circumstances? How about a statement along those lines? As members opposite are waving papers around, I will quote from a media release from the New South Wales Farmers Association headed "Farmers thank Iemma Government for drought subsidies extension." It states:

Farmers across NSW still struggling from ongoing drought have welcomed the extension of drought transport subsidies by the Iemma Government.

NSW Farmers' Association President Jock Laurie says today's announcement shows the State Government understands this drought is getting worse and many farming communities are facing enormous financial and emotional pressure.

Today's extension until the end of November will help ease the burden on many farmers transporting stock, water or fodder in drought affected areas.

As I mentioned earlier, the Government will continue to stand with farmers and farming communities throughout this drought.

### POLICE NUMBERS

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. What is the latest information on the New South Wales Government's plans to boost police numbers and related matters?

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** Tomorrow is a milestone which I am not sure we should celebrate. It is 12 miserable months since Peter Debnam was elected Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Bathurst will come to order.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** There is nothing to celebrate. What is his record of achievement from that day to this—bagging the cops, interfering with the Director of Public Prosecutions, trampling upon the rule of law! Let us not forget the David Clarke right-wing extremist takeover of the party, with the blessing of the Leader of the Opposition. Are we supposed to celebrate that? Bob Menzies would be turning in his grave if he knew what the Leader of the Opposition had got up to over the past 12 months.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** At least Bob Menzies had some respect for the rule of law. I am very concerned about the record of the Leader of the Opposition. Over the past 12 months he has indulged in what I regard as alarming and affronting behaviour. What he has done has been an affront to human dignity. Do honourable members recall him talking about his policy initiatives? He always panics. We cannot have a bloke at the helm who panics. Imagine this bloke at the helm, panicking, and saying quickly, "The daily newspapers are causing

us some grief. Commissioner, round up some thugs." "Premier, what do I charge them with?" "Don't worry, charge them with anything."

Members of the Liberal Party have come up to me—yes, I confess they do talk to me—and said, "Is this bloke for real?" They have told me that they thought the Liberal Party stood for the rule of law, but they are finding the Leader of the Opposition is an embarrassment. I respectfully advise the Leader of the Opposition that his actions are what is called political overreach. He is acting in a populist, opportunistic way, but he has overreached. The best thing he can do is come forward, apologise, and acknowledge that he, not the Commissioner of Police, is the clown. He should acknowledge that in no way will he—

*[Interruption]*

He is decisive. He has said that when he is elected on election night—

*[Interruption]*

Imagine what would happen to this State. I might even take up drinking if that happened. It is tough trying to look good in this game, and drinking does not help—and the guys opposite could tell you that. The Leader of the Opposition said that on election night he will celebrate, have a few drinks and in the early hours of Sunday morning, 25 March, he will wake up Commissioner Moroney and say, "Ken, my instruction to you is to take as many police as you need and charge the thugs with anything that gets them off the streets." My goodness, that is laughable! If some person from a focus group that wants action and wants the thugs rounded up said that, we might think it was all right. We all speak to focus groups about their views on law and order, but this is from someone who pretends to be the Premier. That is what he said.

I am concerned that he is in breach of the common law, the Crimes Act, and possibly the Police Act and the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act because, lo and behold, since the time of Magna Carta one needs evidence. I am concerned because I thought we had left the Joh Bjelke-Petersen days far behind. Do honourable members remember when Joh sat in the witness box and Tony Fitzgerald asked, "What is the separation of powers?" to which Joh replied, "Don't, don't, don't you worry about that." Here we have the Leader of the Opposition telling us, "Don't, don't, don't you worry about that." We do worry, and we are not going to allow this State to go back to some 1970s rerun of a corrupt and rotten National Party State in which he thinks he can phone the Commissioner of Police and say, "Hello, Ken." It is all on the record.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Bathurst will come to order.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** The Leader of the Opposition does not understand the role of government, the Commissioner of Police or the Parliament. Because of that, he is not fit to govern. Contrast that with what the Government is doing. Tomorrow is a very important day for 317 police recruits: they will graduate and become probationary constables. I look forward to witnessing their graduation tomorrow with the Premier and the Commissioner of Police.

*[Interruption]*

I am actually. I have been there a few times.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Gosford will come to order.

*[Interruption]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Gosford will come to order.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** The recruits know that as Minister for Police I am for the police; they like me going there because they know I am for them. They know the Opposition is not for the police; the Opposition is against the police. I am the Minister for Police, and I do not apologise for that. I am going to go there and say, "I'm for you guys. They are not."

**Mr Peter Debnam:** Point of order: If the Minister reckons he is Minister for Police, will he lock up Lewthwaite? Will he finally do something and lock up Lewthwaite?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The Minister has the call.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** We have 317 cops graduating and another 750 in January. That is more than 1,000 coming through the system.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will come to order.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** The recruits will go to Griffith, Coffs Harbour and Ku-ring-gai—no thanks to the Opposition.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: If the Minister is going to try to conform with some of the rules of the House perhaps he could refer to people in our community who should be respected—that is, police—as police and not as cops. You are not the Minister for Cops. Cop it sweet, Carl, and refer to them as police officers. Show some literacy skills, Carl.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** The honourable member for Mount Druitt is a former cop. He does not mind being called a cop. There you go! Things are pretty crook for the Leader of the Opposition and he was given some advice recently from one of John Howard's former advisers, Graham Morris. He said that the Leader of the Opposition needed to "drop a few big ideas on the table" and "some you-beaut policy ideas" on why they should be elected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** What do we have today? Wham—the policy initiative. Wow! That almost blew me over. What was it? Tiny flags on police cars. Hooray! Fantastic!

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Murray-Darling will come to order.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: We are starting to see why not one member on that side wanted him as leader, but for heaven's sake give us the facts.

**Mr SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Give us the facts, all right! Show a little respect for the Parliament and stick with the facts.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

### CAMPBELLTOWN HOSPITAL BABY DEATH

**Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER:** My question is directed to the Premier. Given that NSW Health policy published in January 2005, when he was Minister for Health, states, "where child protection concerns are identified, a report to DOCS should be made", along with "ongoing care requirements", why was a baby, who was born to a methadone-dependant mother with four other children, sent home only to die last Wednesday at Campbelltown Hospital just two weeks after being released?

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** Without additional information from the honourable member for North Shore, I am not able to provide information to the House in relation to what I understand to be a death. I can advise that I am aware of the death of a one-year-old boy on 31 July 2006, which was initially considered non-suspicious until a post mortem revealed—

*[Interruption]*

I do not have any more information on the question. The post mortem revealed significant non-accidental injuries. As I said, I am aware of the tragic death of a baby, but I am not sure if that is the case to which the honourable member has referred. This is an issue that is currently the subject of a police investigation,

and will be followed up by the Coroner. I certainly would not wish to prejudice or influence this case in any way by making further comment.

**Mrs Jillian Skinner:** Point of order: The question related to the death of a baby last Wednesday at Campbelltown Hospital.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier has responded to that. He said he does not have information at this stage.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** I am aware of the tragic death of a one-year-old boy on 31 July 2006. In relation to employment checks of health staff, I can advise the House that the Minister for Health has asked the director general to review options for strengthening the controls over current processes used to conduct employment checks on doctors employed in public hospitals in New South Wales. I understand that the review will look particularly at situations where a doctor or other employee may change employment from one area health service to another, in order to ensure adequate employment checks are undertaken.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will come to order.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** The director general will supply an initial report by 30 September 2006 on action taken and the options available to improve these controls.

### RAIL SERVICES

**Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Transport. What is the latest information on rail reliability and patronage?

**Mr JOHN WATKINS:** This week marks two one-year anniversaries, one more memorable than the other, one much more successful than the other. One is the anniversary of an event that has had a positive impact on the lives of millions of people in Sydney and the other has caused, and continues to cause, enormous distress and resentment among those sitting opposite, especially the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. These one-year milestone events have plenty in common. They both resulted from significant plotting, organisation, rallying of forces and behind-the-scenes arrangements, and the removal of obstacles. As I said, one event was positive, the new CityRail timetable, and the other horribly negative, the appointment of Peter Debnam as Liberal leader.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order.

**Mr JOHN WATKINS:** The new safer and more reliable CityRail timetable marks its first anniversary on Sunday. The latest figures show 91.3 per cent of peak trains running on time, compared with 63 per cent 12 months earlier. RailCorp also advises that an extra 118,000 people have come back to rail services every week. That is a huge increase. An extra five million passengers used trains between September 2005 and June 2006, compared with the previous year. The new timetable was the first major overhaul of the timetable since 1992. It took a team of 10 timetable writers an estimated 15,167 hours to draft and test. More than 2,000 new staff rosters were developed and 2.5 million timetable booklets were printed. It was a major logistical challenge with much plotting and planning.

Tomorrow, the first day of spring, marks another, less successful one-year anniversary, the underhand slide by the honourable member for Vacluse into the job as Leader of the Opposition. It is hard to fathom what he has achieved in that 12-month period. His party colleagues have spent the entire year wondering about the same thing, and I do not think there will be much celebrating of that first anniversary tomorrow. We have heard nothing of any substance from the Leader of the Opposition during the past year, particularly in relation to transport issues—nothing to improve public transport and nothing his party can back.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

*[Interruption]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order for the second time.

**Mr JOHN WATKINS:** In fact, the Opposition is supporting our initiatives.



**Mr Brad Hazzard:** We have a few anniversaries to celebrate with you. Bring along Carmel, bring along Carl.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order for the third time.

**Mr JOHN WATKINS:** I thank the honourable member for Cronulla for having produced a fantastic little RailCorp timetable for the Cronulla line. There it is! It has his photograph on the front and timetable details on the side. It is nicely folded—

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** Point of order: My point of order is that before the timetable changes it was a full page.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! That is not a point of order. It may be a point of personal explanation, although that is up to the honourable member for Cronulla.

**Mr Malcolm Kerr:** Point of order: The only things smaller than the timetable is the number of trains that run on the line.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I will accept that as a personal explanation.

**Mr JOHN WATKINS:** The Leader of the Opposition says that he can fix it. But, fix what? With everything it is the same—"I can fix it." It does not matter what the problem is—"I can fix it". But he cannot negotiate one single policy to explain how he is going fix the problem. Where are his solutions? Where are the plans that the Leader of the Opposition should be putting to the people of this State? While the Government is grinding out improvements to our rail system—91.3 per cent of trains are on time and an extra five million passengers are using RailCorp—the only transport policy that the Leader of the Opposition has announced is about boutique light rail in the central business district [CBD] to look after his mates in the business community. That is it. The Leader of the Opposition would hand over two CBD streets to light rail at a cost of \$200 million and turn the CBD into a car park. The Opposition's proposal for the Sydney CBD is the airport rail line's little brother. But I should not say that too loudly because the airport rail line was Barry's idea, and Barry's ideas do not count for much on level 10 any more.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Government members will cease calling out.

**Mr JOHN WATKINS:** Maybe that is why Barry has not made up his mind about who he will vote for come next March. Even Barry is undecided!

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Willoughby will come to order.

**Mr JOHN WATKINS:** We know that because it is what Barry has been telling the people of Ku-ring-gai. In his most recent newsletter, "Winter 2006", he has given his constituents an outline of the party leaders. Who does he include? He includes the Premier, Morris Iemma. In what order does he come? He comes first. There is a very complimentary profile of the Premier in that newsletter. In fact, in this light the Premier's photograph appears to be larger than that of the Leader of the Opposition! Barry has problems in the Opposition. He is no longer listened to on level 10 and there is a degree of bitterness between those two men that is most distressing.

I will give Barry some text for his next bipartisan newsletter. In it he can write that the Iemma Government is committed to the continuous building of a safe and reliable rail system. The gains over the past year under the new timetable have been significant and we welcome them, but there is much more to be done. There are no simple solutions when it comes to public transport. It is about grinding out improvements every day. The Government will continue its efforts to give the hardworking people of New South Wales the public transport they deserve and we will leave the policy vacuum and the glib one-liners to the Opposition.

#### WESTERN SYDNEY LAND SUPPLY

**Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN:** My question is addressed to the Minister for Planning. What is the latest information on land supply in Western Sydney?

**Mr FRANK SARTOR:** This morning I addressed the national conference of the Housing Industry Association. It was a timely opportunity to correct some of the ridiculous myths that the Opposition, in conjunction with its Federal leader in Canberra, has been peddling about land releases. Myth No. 1, which is drawn from Peter Debnam's favourite book of fairytales, is: Let us release vast tracts of land in the middle of nowhere and worry about the infrastructure later. Do not worry about schools, roads, running water and sewerage systems. What are they? Who needs them? We will just put a flag at the end of the street. That was the chaotic approach we saw from the Coalition when it was last in government. We are still paying for the upgrade of Windsor Road and the north-west rail link, which the Coalition forgot to build when it last released land. Myth No. 2 is that land costs are driven by supply and flooding the market with land will automatically reduce housing costs. It so happens that there is a very partial body called the Productivity Commission, which advises the Federal Government on all matters of economic efficiency.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** Partial?

**Mr FRANK SARTOR:** It is appointed by the Liberal Party. The Productivity Commission reported in its first home ownership report in March 2004:

The dominant source of the widespread escalation in prices has been a general surge in demand.

It is not, as the Opposition suggests, due to a restriction of land supply. But land costs are driven by the market and Peter Costello's interest rates are playing their part. The evidence is incontrovertible. At present there are 100,000 potential lots under the metropolitan development program, 50,000 of which have already been zoned residential. However, 26,000 lots or their equivalent are zoned and serviced as of today. That is a significant stock of land. In fact, 5,700 lots have development approval and could be sold tomorrow but developers are not releasing this land. Some 90 per cent of the lots pre-date any infrastructure levy but they are not being sold. Why? It is because the market cannot take it as a result of Peter Costello's rising interest rates—seven increases in a row.

The Government will continue to release more land but, unlike those opposite, we will match it with infrastructure. We will plan the growth of Sydney in a co-ordinated fashion. I announced this morning that within two years the stock of zoned and serviced land will be not 26,000 lots but 60,000 lots—more than double. We will provide a substantial stock of land—even more than we have now—for the market when Peter Costello and John Howard wake up and get their act together at a Federal level. New South Wales is open for business but until Peter Costello's interest rates stop climbing the property industry may not play the game. At least families know that the New South Wales Government will not forget to build roads, social infrastructure and railway lines when we release land. The Coalition forgot to do that and now we are paying the price.

But let us consider the price we will pay if those opposite win government. Some 29,000 out of 33,000 so-called "back-of-house" public services jobs will go. Forget the Department of Planning because it will no longer exist. Forget the Growth Centres Commission because it will not exist either. The back-of-house public servants who work for those bodies will no longer be there. Planning will be left to councils. There will be no integration of roads, rail, water and electricity, just a good old laissez-faire approach: "It'll be all right; we'll look into it and put a flag on it." According to the Leader of the Opposition the 400 staff of the Department of Planning are surplus to the State's needs.

Forget the fact that in the past year the department made 219 local environmental plans—rezoning applications—and dealt with 350 development applications that provided investment of \$5.8 billion to the State's economy. Under the Coalition's plan, we will have no people to do that work. The honourable member for Gosford, if he is appointed Minister for Planning, will have to do that work himself on the weekend. It would have a devastating impact on the New South Wales economy. Investment in land would cease and infrastructure would no longer be linked to investment, creating chaos. It is a recipe for economic ruin.

Apart from the metropolitan strategy, the department has launched three draft strategies for regional New South Wales to start communicating with communities, councils and developers about how we manage growth in this State. If there are no more staff and no more strategies all that will be gone. We are upgrading the centres of six cities, and the Wollongong plan was released recently. If there are no more staff there will be no more upgrading of city centres. Under a Coalition government, the staff who make all this happen will be out of a job. Ad hoc planning will return and there will be no infrastructure to match the growth that this State has to manage. The mob opposite is a sham. Those opposite would say anything, promise everything and do nothing.

### GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD CHAIRMAN AND WESTSIDE PROPERTY DEVELOPMENTS

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** My question is directed to the Premier. Given that Frank Gelonesi lied to the Independent Commission Against Corruption, telling it that he did not know of anyone buying and selling government properties when in fact he and the Minister for Energy, Joe Tripodi, were trading millions of dollars worth of government property through Westside Property Developments, why has the Premier not sacked him as Chairman of the Greater Western Sydney Economic Development Board for breaching the Premier's code of conduct?

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** As the Minister has already stated, this matter has been referred to the ICAC.

### WESTERN SYDNEY INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr PAUL GIBSON:** My question is addressed to the Minister for Western Sydney. What is the latest information on roads and infrastructure provision in Western Sydney?

**Ms DIANE BEAMER:** We all know that Western Sydney is Australia's third largest economy and home to 1.8 million Australians. The Iemma Government has demonstrated its commitment to invest in Western Sydney to make it a better place to work, live and play. This year alone the Government will spend more than \$2 billion in Western Sydney on vital infrastructure, which is \$300 million more than last year. The Government will spend more than \$400 million on road projects and easy access upgrades at railway stations across the region; \$75 million on Parramatta's justice precinct; more than \$32 million on capital works programs in our hospitals; and \$129 million to buy land for the north-west and south-west rail corridors.

This Government is backing its plans with dollars. They are big plans, big dollars. The Government is ready to build new homes for 180,000 families in the north-west and south-west sectors. An amount of \$483 million has already been allocated in the next four years for infrastructure for our growth centres, building communities for hardworking Australians. The growth centre infrastructure plan includes: 59 primary schools and 16 high schools, 175 kilometres of new and upgraded roads, 11 fire stations, 10 ambulance stations and four police stations. This Government is planning for Sydney's growth and delivering the infrastructure. Those are achievements of the Iemma Government in Western Sydney, backed up by the confidence of industry and commerce. What did the *Sydney Morning Herald* say last weekend?

Motorway drives business west ... the anticipated increase in demand for industrial space in Sydney's west ... appear to be right on the money ...

The CB Richard Ellis report states:

Westlink M7 and the Iemma Government's city of Cities plan ... sparked a 58 per cent jump in new developments ... just in the first six months of the Iemma Government.

That development is backed up by infrastructure. Unlike the plan of the Leader of the Opposition of "Just fix it", this Government is big on detail.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

**Ms DIANE BEAMER:** Compare the actions and plans of the Iemma Government in Western Sydney to the silence of the Opposition that has no plans for infrastructure, apart from pumping \$200 million into a tram in Sydney's central business district while axing 9,000 jobs in Western Sydney. The Opposition said it has got it right in Western Sydney. As Minister for Western Sydney, I faced a budget estimates hearing this week, just like all Ministers must, and how many questions were asked of me about Western Sydney? How many questions did the Leader of the Opposition provide to his people in the upper House to ask?

**Mr Bryce Gaudry:** Twenty?

**Ms DIANE BEAMER:** No, not one question. Members of the Opposition declined to ask a question about Western Sydney and did not ask one question of clarification.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Members of the Government will come to order.

**Ms DIANE BEAMER:** Remember when the Leader of the Opposition went to Ingleburn in Western Sydney and had smoked salmon?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for East Hills to order.

**Ms DIANE BEAMER:** This is great. One year ago the Leader of the Opposition told the *Macarthur Chronicle*, "Have no doubt about that. In a few weeks 100 per cent of the population will know who I am." Guess what? The Leader of the Opposition has had to bring in the big guns and get advice from Nick Greiner because people in Western Sydney do not know who he is.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Bathurst will come to order.

**Ms DIANE BEAMER:** He survived the Opposition, and I have to congratulate him, but as Opposition spokesman for Western Sydney, he has done nothing. The Leader of the Opposition declared Glenmore Park a centre of urban terrorism. He highlighted spiralling crimes. In Western Sydney they are spiralling downwards. He talked about strengths in local area commands when they are over strength. His one contribution is to axe 9,000 jobs. I am glad he is the silent shadow Minister for Western Sydney.

### BALGOWLAH NORTH PUBLIC SCHOOL

**Mr DAVID BARR:** My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the state of play with respect to the capital works upgrade for Balgowlah North Public School?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Baulkham Hills to order.

**Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT:** I take this opportunity to point out to the honourable member for Manly and other honourable members that in fact our budget this year for capital improvements in schools is \$485 million. That substantial investment will go towards 22 new major building projects in schools right across New South Wales, as well as continuing 74 major building projects in schools and TAFEs which will benefit with these improved capital programs. Balgowlah North Public School will directly benefit from this record spending. Planning is well under way for four new permanent classrooms to be constructed at the school to replace existing demountable accommodation, funded in the most recent budget.

I am advised that the asset management staff of the department worked closely with school representatives to review and discuss a number of options for the configuration of new buildings on the school site. I understand that agreement has been reached with the school on an option to proceed, and the necessary documentation is currently being prepared for lodgment of a development application. At this stage it is anticipated that construction will be completed and the new classrooms will be ready for occupation in November 2007.

Under the Government's class size reduction program, Balgowlah North Public School will also receive a modular design range building, which will accommodate two permanent classrooms. I am advised that the department, in consultation with the school, has also determined a site location for this new building. The building will be installed during term four this year—ready for occupation for the commencement of term one, 2007. More than \$200,000 was also approved as part of the 2005-06 minor capital works program to upgrade stormwater drainage at the school and to repair erosion. This school will also benefit from additional funding provided by this Government for maintenance improvements across the State—\$120 million extra funding over four years. Balgowlah North Public School will benefit with projects to repair footpaths and a sports court.

I am also advised of a range of other maintenance works that have been identified by the principal, which will be carried out during the year as part of the program maintenance work that has to be done. In addition to the new work that is under way to provide classrooms and stormwater management, the department has completed a facilities review at Balgowlah North Public School, which incorporates recommendations that have been made by the school community. I am advised that a permanent library, hall, staff parking and parent drop-off zone have been identified as the school's priorities. Funding for those projects will be considered in the context of competing regional and statewide priorities in future budgets.

**CAMPBELLTOWN HOSPITAL BABY DEATH**

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** Earlier in question time the honourable member for North Shore asked the Premier a question. I have sought further information on behalf of the Premier on the issue raised by the honourable member for North Shore.

**Mr Malcolm Kerr:** Why doesn't the Premier answer?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister is perfectly competent to answer the question.

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** I am advised that this matter is currently the subject of a police investigation and, as a result, further information is unable to be provided.

**Questions without notice concluded.**

**SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:**

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Tuesday 5 September 2006 at 2.15 p.m.

**CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS****State Infrastructure Investment**

**Mr FRANK SARTOR** (Rockdale—Minister for Planning, Minister for Redfern Waterloo, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [3.19 p.m.]: This week Federal Treasurer Peter Costello called on the New South Wales Government to substantially curtail its infrastructure development program. My motion is urgent because both industry and families need to know that this Parliament is determined to ensure that development is matched by infrastructure. It is urgent to highlight the inherent risk associated with the Coalition's approach to land supply. The Federal Government is split on the causes for its failure to manage the national economy, and is filling the airwaves with red herrings to shift the blame for interest rate rises. These Liberal Party lies must be addressed, and they must be addressed now.

This matter is urgent because the State Opposition's proposal to slash 29,000 jobs from the public service will result in the abolition of the Department of Planning, and that will grind New South Wales to a halt. It is important that this undeliverable commitment is exposed and the Opposition is called to account. The public needs to know whether the New South Wales Coalition supports an ad hoc system of land release. Does it support Peter Costello's plans to cut infrastructure investment? These are questions they must answer today. Under the Coalition policy as it stands, we will have no infrastructure and no planning. This proposal must be rejected, and it must be rejected urgently.

**John Lewthwaite Parole**

**Mr PETER DEBNAM** (Vaucluse—Leader of the Opposition) [3.20 p.m.]: There are two urgent matters today: firstly, for the Minister for Planning to return Alan Jones' phone call; and, secondly, the motion I have put forward today, which is clearly the most urgent: That this House condemns the Labor Government for its failure to protect the community and to return John Lewthwaite to gaol. I put on the record again that I said to the Minister for Police today: You are now in a position of power and able to take urgent action on this most important community concern. In 1999, when John Lewthwaite was released into the community, Carl Scully said:

I share the disappointment about the release of Lewthwaite. For those who are not aware, I am not the Attorney General, the Minister for Police or the Minister for Corrective Services.

Well, Carl Scully is now Minister for Police and he should be taking action on behalf of the community, and he is not. Coalition members want to know why the Labor Party does not want to return John Lewthwaite to gaol.

In the past couple of days, in this Parliament and publicly, we have given the Government our wholehearted commitment that whatever it needs to return Lewthwaite to gaol will be supported by the Coalition. It is the Government's decision. This is an urgent matter for the people of New South Wales, but seemingly not for the Labor Party.

I think it is getting to the point where the people of New South Wales want to know why the Labor Party refuses to accept the full support of the Parliament and take action. If that urgent action requires legislation, we are happy to sit tonight or tomorrow and pass the legislation to ensure Lewthwaite goes back to gaol. If it wants to sack all those on the Parole Board and replace them with people who will act in the community interest, we will support that action. The Government can do that now—before 5 o'clock, before sunset—and we will support it.

One of the points I made to the Minister for Police yesterday was that in previous years he had said he was very concerned for the safety of his own son, that Lewthwaite had lived in his area, and that he feared for the safety of his son and his family. Imagine how the people of New South Wales feel now that the Minister for Police has moved John Lewthwaite to a new location and has not told the new community in which he is now located. Members of that community expected, as the Minister for Police did, advice on which New South Wales community he was putting this paedophile child killer.

**Ms Kristina Keneally:** You put him there.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** The honourable member for Heffron may not have been here at the time, but it is important that she understand that the Labor Party let John Lewthwaite out in 1999 and at that time the Attorney General said Lewthwaite would be surrounded by—

**Mr Tony Stewart:** You people set up the policy to let him out, and you know it.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Bankstown will come to order.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** The honourable member for Bankstown is now defending the release of Lewthwaite into the community. The Labor Government let him out in 1999, and the Attorney General said that Lewthwaite would be surrounded by a web of restrictions and if he crossed the line, even in a trifling way, he would be back behind bars. That is why we have said in this Parliament and in the public arena in the past few days: Whatever the Government needs to do to put John Lewthwaite behind bars, the Coalition will support. The Parliament will sit for another couple of hours today, and we are very happy to support whatever legislation is necessary to put Lewthwaite behind bars today.

The system that we want is the system that the Labor Government has spoken about for a long time: that is, when repeat offenders are caught reoffending, they "get gaol not bail". That was a commitment that Labor made, and made very strongly, before the last election. It said these repeat offenders will "get gaol not bail". In fact the Premier said if repeat offenders have a court appearance coming up, they can prepare for it from gaol. That is all we are asking for. We are asking the Minister for Police, the Premier, and the Attorney General to help the community.

The Nationals and the Liberal Party will support whatever this Labor Government wants to do to get John Lewthwaite back behind bars. As I have said, if that includes new legislation, we will rush it through this House. If it includes sacking the Parole Board this afternoon, we will agree with that. Let's sack the lot of them! Let's replace them this afternoon with people who will lock up John Lewthwaite. If the Government wants to do that, it has a couple of hours of this sitting left. We will support you. Otherwise, you will be betraying the community.

**Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Rockdale be proceeded with—put.**

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 54**

Ms Allan	Ms Gadiel	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Amery	Mr Gaudry	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Mrs Perry
Mr Barr	Mr Greene	Ms Saliba
Mr Bartlett	Ms Hay	Mr Sartor
Ms Beamer	Mr Hickey	Mr Scully
Mr Black	Mr Hunter	Mr Shearan
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Stewart
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Campbell	Mr Lynch	Mr Torbay
Mr Chaytor	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Collier	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Mr Corrigan	Mr McTaggart	Mr Whan
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	Mr Yeadon
Mr Daley	Ms Megarrity	
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Draper	Mr Newell	Mr Ashton
Mrs Fardell	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Martin

**Noes, 29**

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Seaton
Mr Armstrong	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Humpherson	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Farrell	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

**Question resolved in the affirmative.**

**STATE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT****Urgent Motion**

**Mr FRANK SARTOR** (Rockdale—Minister for Planning, Minister for Redfern Waterloo, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [3.30 p.m.]: I move:

That this House condemns the Federal Treasurer for his attack on the Government for spending heavily on infrastructure.

On Tuesday the *Australian Financial Review* said that New South Wales is building too much infrastructure. Can you believe it! According to Peter Costello, New South Wales investment on infrastructure is pushing up inflation and, hence, interest rates. It is not the minerals boom in Western Australia or Queensland, nor is it the failure of the Federal Government to invest in skills and professions. According to the Coalition, it is our investment in infrastructure. I wonder if the Coalition also blames the record \$39.8 billion investment in New South Wales to the year ending March 2006 for this problem.

We are very proud of the fact that we have planned our investment in infrastructure in a co-ordinated way to ensure that land release is matched with infrastructure expenditure. Members of the New South Wales Opposition took their lead from their master in Canberra, John Howard. They said that it was a failure to release more land for greenfields property development that caused inflation. Blame anyone, say anything, and promise everything. The Opposition's approach is simply to repeat the line directed by Canberra. Who is correct, Peter Costello or John Howard? Who will members of the Opposition take their instructions from today? Is infrastructure investment or land supply causing inflation? It is neither.

The fact is that the Government is proud that it is spending more than \$10 billion a year, an average of 27 million a day, on infrastructure. As the premier said on Tuesday, we are not going to stop investing in the growth of this State because it does not suit Peter Costello and the Leader of the Opposition. When it comes to inflation, the biggest causes for concern lie fairly and squarely in Howard and Costello's backyard: rising interest rates—seven consecutive increases since 2002—rising petrol prices and the Commonwealth's self-induced skills shortage.

Mr Howard has argued, of course, that the problem is lack of land supply. The New South Wales Government has released a considerable amount of greenfields land. Greenfields land for more than 100,300 dwellings has been included in the Metropolitan Development Program as land to be released—13 years supply. The equivalent of 50,000 lots has already been zoned residential. A total of 26,652 new lots have already been zoned and serviced and are ready for development. In the past year, the Government zoned more than 17,000 new lots for residential development in the greenfields areas of Balmoral Road and Edmondson Park. We have also announced that within the next five years 40,000 new housing lots will be rezoned in the growth centres.

Developers are making the decision not to move on a lot of the zoned and serviced land. Of the 26,000 plus potential homes, 10,500 have passed through State Government rezoning processes, but the developers have not gone to councils for development application approvals. To paraphrase Bill Clinton, a former President of United States of America: it is the economy, stupid. In fact, 5,700 lots have passed through all planning and development approvals and could be made available for sale tomorrow by developers, but interest rate rises are stopping that from happening. The second critical factor is that the State infrastructure levy is not the reason for zoned and serviced land not reaching the market: 90 per cent of the 26,000-odd lots that are zoned and serviced by the Government are not subject to a State infrastructure levy. The Government will continue to look at ways to deliver more sustainable and affordable land releases to the market, but there is another salient fact—the Federal Government's GST rip-off. Up to \$3 billion a year comes out of the New South Wales economy and is taken from the people of New South Wales.

The Federal Government applies a much larger burden than any levy or charge that is applied by the State Government. As all honourable members know, New South Wales gets ripped off every year. If that were reversed, there may not need to be any infrastructure levy, but of course the Opposition refuses to stand up for the people of New South Wales. The loyalty of members of the Opposition to their mates in Canberra is much more important than is their loyalty to the people of New South Wales. Therefore, \$3 billion in GST is taken from us and given to the boom States on the pretext that New South Wales has too many bus shelters. What a charade! It is a political jihad by the Liberal Party against the people of this State, but if it were reversed, those funds could provide for all the requisite infrastructure for growth centres in just 2.5 years alone. In that period, \$7.5 billion could be raised for infrastructure that is needed in growth centre areas.

But this Government will do more. The Government will release more land to build on the available stock. We are looking at new land release benchmarks and we will be setting benchmarks. One benchmark is that we will achieve 60,000 zoned and serviced lots by 2008. The details can be found on the Department of Planning's web site. The Government will ensure that is matched with infrastructure. The Government is determined to ensure that land releases are matched with infrastructure. That is why out of an expenditure of over half a billion dollars over the next five years in growth centres, 80 per cent is being funded initially by the New South Wales Government. The calls by the Opposition for an uncontrolled laissez-faire approach to land release is irresponsible and reckless. My colleague the Minister for Western Sydney will provide more details of the Coalition's disastrous record in government. The honourable member for Londonderry will expose the disaster for the western suburbs of Sydney if the Coalition were ever to win office. He will focus on the Coalition's agenda to abolish the Growth Centres Commission and the Department of Planning.

The promises made by the Opposition are more than just political puffery: they are seriously irresponsible promises that seek to undermine the economy of New South Wales—an economy which, in the last year to March, recorded investment of \$39 billion, or an increase of 17 per cent on the previous year. The Government has an infrastructure program that will result in spending of over \$40 billion over the next four years, in other words, over \$10 billion a year or \$27 million per day. The Government has devised a critical strategy for metropolitan Sydney that will deliver sustainable development. It is not just development with infrastructure, but well-planned, sustainable development that is carried out in a cost-effective manner. The New South Wales Government condemns the Federal Treasurer's call for New South Wales to stop investing in infrastructure. We condemn the Leader of the Opposition for calling for more land releases without infrastructure support, and we condemn the Coalition for seeking to shift the blame for interest rate rises and inflation to anything but its own policies. The Coalition's motto remains the same—blame anyone, say anything, promise everything. But Labor knows the Coalition will do nothing.



**Mr CHRIS HARTCHER** (Gosford) [3.40 p.m.]: In the spirit of shortening the proceedings of the House, I will not speak for the full 10 minutes available to me either. I will just speak for 9 minutes and 50 seconds. I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "That" with a view to inserting instead:

"this House

- (1) condemns the failure of the Carr and Iemma governments to adequately invest in infrastructure of New South Wales; and
- (2) supports increased funding to renew this State's antiquated infrastructure, including State highways."

The New South Wales Government, under the tutelage of a number of Ministers including the Minister for Planning, who has just spoken, has allowed the infrastructure of this State to run down to an extraordinary degree. It is well recognised that that is the legacy of Mr Carr. Premier Iemma must share responsibility for that legacy because he was part of Mr Carr's Government. New South Wales has no new directions. It continues in its old direction of inadequate infrastructure, poor railway and transport systems, a totally inadequate hospital system, an antiquated schools system, and roads that the Auditor-General found had not been maintained at a very poor level. The State infrastructure is literally falling apart. The Minister for Planning must accept his fair share of responsibility for that.

This Government is plagued by constant budget overruns, delays and underspending. Take for example the extraordinary saga of what was to be the Parramatta-Chatswood rail line, which is now the Epping-Chatswood rail line. The cost has blown out by no less than \$900 million. That amount of money is enough to build at least two major hospitals, approximately 45 high schools, or a major four-lane freeway from Sydney to Bega, but it has all been thrown away in an exercise characterised by massively poor planning and inadequately organised projects. The State Government is simply getting in the way. I quote from an article in the *Australian Financial Review* dated 30 May 2006, the actual title of which is "Government is just getting in the way":

Infrastructure inadequacies are seen by many as economic choke points, but where problems have occurred they stem from governments.

The article in the *Australian Financial Review* details the total inadequacy of the New South Wales Labor Government and its incredibly incompetent administration of the State's infrastructure. Another article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Anne Davies on 22 May states, "Grand plans need dollars and details". The great failing of the Minister for Planning, who is full of grand plans, is that we hear about them constantly. They look great, they are all presented with coloured maps, and they all look so lovely on colour television. They are big displays, but they all lack dollars and they all lack detail. They are simply a reflection of the inadequate planning of the Minister for Planning and the Government's inadequate administration. Part of the article of 22 May states:

But when asked where the big-picture plan was [the public servant] Schott [said] ... "We don't put it out because it would raise expectations and it doesn't give the Government the opportunity to change their mind," ... There was a gasp at this candour. Fear of being held accountable to a plan is one of the reasons the Carr-Iemma Government seems to be allergic to long-term planning.

That is why, after 11 years of government and only six months from a State election, the Iemma Government has begun to talk about a State Plan. Something like \$15 million of taxpayers' money will be spent by members of the Government wandering around the State in an attempt to develop a State Plan that they know will go nowhere and will merely be a series of coloured drawings. The article went on to state:

The former transport minister, Carl Scully, still smarts over his Action for Transport 2010, released four months before the 1999 election. It has been used regularly by the Opposition to lampoon the Government's progress on public transport.

That plan included a magnificent proposal for the high-speed rail link between Sydney and the Central Coast displayed on full-page newspaper advertisements. The project would have cost \$800 million. Gee, it was a great idea. The campaign involved full-page advertisements, exhorting people to vote Labor in the 1999 election because the project was going to happen. It is now nearly 2007 and the whole program has been quietly shelved, quietly laid to rest. The article continued:

Bob Carr's 2002 State Infrastructure Strategic Plan, another pre-election effort, was even more woeful. It was simply a list of every project the Government could think of at the time.

It was noticeable in this afternoon's comments by the Minister for Planning that he did not detail any infrastructure proposals of his own. All he wanted to do was to talk about who was to blame for nothing happening in New South Wales. He tried to place the blame. As is often said about the Labor Government: it does not matter how you play the game, it is how you place the blame. We saw a classic example of that earlier this afternoon. Anne Davies' article continued:

The historic structure of the public service hasn't helped. The Department of Planning was always a bit player in the bureaucracy, with much more powerful entities such as the Department of Transport, the Roads and Traffic Authority, RailCorp, the electricity companies and Sydney Water controlling their own destinies and budgets.

That changed four years ago when Carr finally acknowledged that Sydney, grappling with 1000 new people a week, needed a plan. He created a Department of Planning and Natural Resources and pulled the transport planners into the fold as well ...

Uncharacteristically, the Iemma Government, never shy about a media opportunity, is talking down expectations. The main reason is that it will contain nothing new.

That is it: nothing new at all. The article continued:

That's because there are so many projects at press release stage already: the north-west rail line (announced in 1998)—

nothing has happened—

the south-west rail line (announced in 2001)—

nothing has happened—

the second rail crossing under the harbour (announced last June)—

nothing has happened—

the on-again, off-again M4 East extension (announced in 2002)—

nothing has happened—

the extra lanes on Spit Bridge (announced in 2003)—

nothing has happened—

and the equally uncertain truck tunnel from Port Botany to the M4 (mooted in 2004)—

That was announced again two weeks ago, in 2006, and nothing has happened. The high-speed railway line from Gosford to Sydney was announced in 1999, but nothing has happened. A total litany of failure, a litany of government by press release. It is a litany of a Government desperate to always find new proposals to announce whatever will look good on the night's television. Then, with a cynical laugh, former Premier Bob Carr and current Premier Morris Iemma, who represents the electorate of Lakemba, walk away—and walk away consistently! The article continued:

Apart from a bit of land acquisition here and there, all these projects are all still "on the drawing board", as they say in the classics. And they're unfunded ...

When the Parramatta-Chatswood Rail Link—

which is now the Epping to Chatswood rail link—

blew out to over \$1 billion, and was then halved in length, Scully's other plans were shelved as well. Only public-private funded projects have been delivered on time ...

No wonder Sydney has lurched ever closer to becoming a Los Angeles-style city, because only half the transport plan—the car part—has been delivered.

That was delivered by the public-private partnerships. That is what we get: it is only when the private sector provides the infrastructure project that it takes place, be it a toll road or anything else. Anything that is supposed to be done by this Government never happens. We see the coloured maps, the press release and the Premier, whoever he is, merging into one, standing before the maps, looking very solemnly at the cameras, pledging that great things will take place in New South Wales. We all know that as soon as the press leave the maps and plans will be folded up and put in the archives. The Government deserves every censure. I call upon the House to condemn the Government in accordance with the amendment I moved to the motion. I spoke for 10 minutes: my apologies to the House.

**Ms DIANE BEAMER** (Mulgoa—Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [3.50 p.m.]: The New South Wales Government has outlined clear and constructive plans for land releases in Western Sydney. We are creating liveable suburbs, well-serviced by infrastructure providing all the essential services so those communities can thrive. What is the alternative? History shows that under a Liberal government land release would be unplanned, ad hoc and unco-ordinated, without any plan for infrastructure. Let us look at the evidence: the Liberals' land releases in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They created a mess that the New South Wales Government is still cleaning up. The victims of the Liberals' policy were the hardworking mums and dads of Western Sydney.

Under the previous Government we saw new residential estates spring up without major road or rail infrastructure, forcing families to rely on their cars; developers controlling the location of sewerage and water services so residential development was splattered across Sydney; new suburbs falling far short of families needs and expectations; and the taxpayer footing a hefty bill for retrofitting new land release areas. That is in stark contrast to the Government's plans to co-ordinate land releases with new infrastructure and services, something a Liberal government has never done and does not intend to do. Under the co-ordinated approach developed by the New South Wales Government, we have the Sydney Metropolitan Plan, which sets the strategic framework for residential development and new land releases, and the State Infrastructure Plan, which outlines \$2 billion in infrastructure spending in Western Sydney this year alone, and which backs up the new land release areas with a comprehensive infrastructure plan so families can access services such as roads, rail, buses, schools and health facilities.

Over the next 10 years in Sydney's north-west and south-west growth centres we are planning 12 schools, two fire stations, two ambulance stations, a police station, Western Sydney recycled water projects, new and upgraded roads, and the biggest rail expansion since the 1930s. We are planning for land releases alongside new infrastructure so the mistakes of the past, the mistakes of the previous Liberal Government, are never repeated. Western Sydney deserves better. I am proud to say that we take the business of providing new homes for families in Western Sydney very seriously. The Government will not be responsible for dumping home buyers on vast parcels of greenfields land that are not supplied with services.

What is the Opposition's current plan for building new suburbs in Western Sydney? The Leader of the Opposition continues repeating the mantra of supplying more land. Sydney already has a sizeable stock of greenfields land. The challenge is supplying that land with the right mix of infrastructure and services. But the Leader of the Opposition is silent on infrastructure—not one word about infrastructure, not one word about providing essential services to these new suburbs to avoid the disastrous result of the former Coalition Government's approach to land release. Perhaps the problem is that the Opposition simply does not understand the Sydney property market.

The honourable member for Southern Highlands has been bleating on about lot production in Sydney. She does not seem to understand that property developers produce lots, not the State Government. Land is zoned and serviced by the State Government. Right now in Sydney there is enough zoned and serviced land for 26,000 new homes. As the Minister said, over the next two years that will rise to 60,000 homes and land release will be accompanied by infrastructure. Fortunately, one Liberal member from Western Sydney does have a plan—unfortunately for the Leader of the Opposition, it is his fellow Federal parliamentarian, Pat Farmer. Pat Farmer's infrastructure plan is to build a monorail alongside motorways. That is the only plan I have heard of for new infrastructure in the suburbs of Western Sydney.

Who should pay for that inspired policy? Who should pay for \$5.5 billion worth of infrastructure? Pat Farmer said it should not be the Federal Government, which is sitting on a surplus of \$11 billion. No, the New South Wales taxpayer should foot the \$5.5 billion bill for the 70-kilometre ill-conceived monorail plan. That is the Liberal Party's sole policy suggestion for co-ordinating the release of land with infrastructure, but it did not come from the State Opposition. At least Pat Farmer is having a go, because the Leader of the Opposition is out of touch with the real needs of the west, and the real needs of homebuyers. He should be holding John Howard accountable for his false promise to keep down interest rates. He will not stand up to Canberra, of course, and will not stand up for Western Sydney families and demand a fair share of our GST. If he wins Government, I bet he will not be delivering new infrastructure alongside new land releases. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE** (Bega) [3.55 p.m.]: I support the amendment moved by the honourable member for Gosford relating to the State's infrastructure. The community would be very happy to hear members of Parliament say that they are willing to work with other tiers of government, be it Commonwealth or local, to deliver State infrastructure. I note that throughout this debate the mayor of Queanbeyan, Frank Pangallo, has

been in the public gallery. There is no doubt that communities in this State are angry at the quality of infrastructure at a local level. In particular, they refer to local government issues such as country town water and sewerage, timber bridges, libraries and that type of infrastructure. It is frustrating that the Government continues to want to shift the blame for the state of infrastructure in New South Wales to either local government or the Federal Government. We certainly have to plan for infrastructure, but the planning that has occurred in New South Wales has been continuous, over the top and based on political spin.

I love the way this so-called new Iemma Government is being bandied around the place. To me it is nothing more than the dregs of the Carr Government. The current Government is delivering hollow promises to communities throughout New South Wales. The best example I can give in relation to that is the proposed State Infrastructure Plan. It states, for instance, that on the far South Coast Bega Valley health services are going to be provided over the next 10 years. I presume that means a Bega Valley regional base hospital, which the Minister for Health has announced will cost \$100 million. However, if you read the fine print in the State Infrastructure Plan you will see an asterisk and the words, "not yet approved". That is the type of nonsense that occurs time and again in New South Wales. Glossy documents are produced but there is very little on the ground in infrastructure.

I am pleased to support the amendment of the honourable member for Gosford that relates to the condition of highways in this State. The Princes Highway on the far South Coast is in a ridiculous state. It meets the requirements of a 1950s highway. In the lead-up to the 2007 election we will hear a lot from the Labor Government about what it has done, but the fact is that 43 lives have been lost on that highway since the last State election. All we have seen are numerous press releases about what the Government is doing, while the highway remains in the state it was in four years ago. That is a sad indictment of the Government. That goes to the heart of the types of infrastructure projects that need to be rectified in this State. This infrastructure deficit is costing lives.

I point to the many infrastructure problems throughout the State's education system. Last week I took the opportunity to visit Cobargo Public School on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of that school's library. However, it happens to be the same library in a demountable classroom 25 years on. The library, a very important centre for learning, is housed in a demountable building with no insulation. There are problems with the school toilet facilities. Two of the six classrooms are housed in permanent buildings, the remaining being uninsulated demountable classrooms. The airconditioners do not operate in an effective manner. When it rains the students and teachers get wet because there are no covered walkways at the school and there is no indoor space where the school community can congregate. The canteen is up to standard and there is a disability access.

This is the type of thing that is going on within New South Wales' public schools. I am hopeful that the Minister will agree to meet with a delegation of teachers, parents and the school community to try to thrash it out and get this matter resolved. This is the type of infrastructure that matters to people in New South Wales, infrastructure in their local communities and local areas. It includes infrastructure such as the Bateman's Bay marina, which has been highly contentious and in respect of which there has been no consultation. The Government has been happy to dictate to the community how it will operate in the future. I call on honourable members to support the amendment. We need to focus on partnership building in New South Wales, something in respect of which the Government has failed dismally.

**Mr ALLAN SHEARAN** (Londonderry) [4.00 p.m.]: The question we need to ask today is: What does the New South Wales Coalition stand for on land release? Does it want infrastructure or not? Does it support Peter Costello's calls to stop investment in infrastructure or not? Does it promote wholesale land release or not? If it does, is that with or without infrastructure? How is the Coalition going to answer any of these questions after it has slashed 29,000 back-of-house public service positions? As has been clearly established by the Premier in this very House, once front line services are excluded, once the back-of-house positions that provide essential support for front-line services, are excluded, all that is left is only 33,000 public servants from which to find the 29,000 jobs.

That means, quite simply, the abolition of the entire Department of Planning. It would also result in the elimination of the Growth Centres Commission. Who is going to plan the development of land in my electorate and in the rest of Western Sydney for population growth? How will we provide homes for young families in Western Sydney when the investment dries up because of planning chaos? Economic growth will simply dry up. The construction industry is a major contributor to the economy of New South Wales and if the planning system freezes, that industry will be shattered. Investment will simply leave New South Wales and head for other States.

Is that what the Opposition proposes? On the other hand, the Government is determined to ensure that growth is matched with infrastructure. Any decent system of planning practice demands that these things are carefully considered. The Minister for Western Sydney has told of the sad history of Coalition neglect in this city, and it simply cannot be repeated. The election of those opposite would risk economic development in this State. The Opposition's inexperience is mind-boggling and it is asking the public to vote for candidates who are just as green around the ears. The Liberal candidate for Londonderry, Bart Bassett, has been fed the same rubbish that the honourable member for Southern Highlands keeps repeating. They are both confusing the number of new homes released by developers with land released by the Government.

As we heard today, 5,700 lots are zoned serviced and ready to be released to the market tomorrow, except that developers will not release the lots to the market until interest rates ease off. That is why developers released only 2,780 lots to the market in 2005-06. The land is released by the developers, not the Government, something that the honourable member for Southern Highlands and perhaps Bart Bassett should note. By slashing and burning public service jobs the Opposition will create a planning vacuum with wholesale, ad hoc, unco-ordinated land releases and no infrastructure. That would be a return to the traditional poor planning of past Coalition governments. We all know what that leads to, but still they have not learned.

I moved to Western Sydney in 1976. At that time there was no sewerage, no local hospital and no TAFE, just to detail some of the inadequacies and poor planning. It took the Wran Labor Government years to rectify the poor Liberal planning. And what did they do between 1988 and 1995? They did the same as in previous years—opened up masses of land in the north-west without appropriate infrastructure, and we are now playing catch-up in respect of the provision of that infrastructure. I am pleased to say that we are completing infrastructure such as the Windsor Road upgrade, we have rebuilt our major hospitals and we are building new schools in new release areas such as Ropes Crossing in my electorate. If the Coalition ever occupies the government benches, families will be dumped in new homes without transport options, rail or roads, schools or hospitals. This is not a policy; it is a recipe for disaster that will result in a hefty bill when future governments are required to retrofit these essential infrastructure services. Once again, it will be a catch-up situation. The Opposition should be condemned.

**Mr FRANK SARTOR** (Rockdale—Minister for Planning, Minister for Redfern Waterloo, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [4.05 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Minister for Western Sydney, who spoke about the Opposition's disastrous infrastructure record and its ridiculous monorail proposal. The Opposition would solve the problem with a monorail and then put a flag on it. Perhaps it should be a moving flag.

**Mr Andrew Constance:** An Australian flag.

**Mr FRANK SARTOR:** Of course. That matter is not in dispute—unless it was a Liberal Party flag. I also thank the honourable member for Londonderry, who asked what the New South Wales Opposition stands for on the land release issue and explored the disaster that would befall the people of Western Sydney, including his constituents, if the Coalition were ever to accidentally win government again in this State. The honourable member for Gosford, who made a contribution of sorts, suggested that there has been no real investment in infrastructure in New South Wales. He ignored the fact that in the past decade real-term infrastructure investment was probably twice the level it was during the previous decade. In 2006-07 alone investment in infrastructure totals \$10 billion. For the first time we have a State infrastructure strategy that foreshadows infrastructure expenditure for 10 years and funds it for the first four years. For example, in the next year the Government will invest \$10 billion in infrastructure in New South Wales, which is \$318,000 in infrastructure investment per person.

The State Liberal Party is trying to save face because Peter Costello said that the New South Wales Government is spending too much on infrastructure. The situation is becoming very confusing. Those opposite claim that our infrastructure investment is ramshackle and inadequate while Costello says we are spending too much. What does this mean? It means that the Government is doing a good job on infrastructure and the State Opposition is totally confused. Opposition members would say anything, promise everything and do nothing. That is motto of the New South Wales Liberal Party.

**Mr Andrew Constance:** What have you been doing, Frank?

**Mr FRANK SARTOR:** The honourable member for Bega keeps writing to me, wanting me to call in developments and intervene in development matters. He does not get it. The Government is spending record

amounts on health services, especially mental health services. In fact, this year our health spending has increased by 7.6 per cent. We are spending \$129 million on purchasing new railway corridors this year. We are completing the expansion of Port Botany. We are spending a record amount on public transport.

**Ms Katrina Hodgkinson:** Parramatta?

**Mr FRANK SARTOR:** Exactly, Parramatta. The Government is spending record amounts on rail expansion, corridor acquisition, new carriages—you name it. We are spending a record amount on the electricity sector. We already have the most reliable system and the cheapest electricity prices in Australia but, guess what, in the next few years we will cater for growth in that system while maintaining reliability. We are spending a record amount on recycling. We will soon be recycling and producing more potable water than any other city in Australia.

Yet Peter Costello says that we are spending too much. He did not want us to make the record investment of \$39 billion that we achieved in the 12 months ending March this year, and of course he would prefer we did not invest \$10 billion in public sector infrastructure this year. Infrastructure is vital. Land use and infrastructure go together. The Government is determined to press on with a vision for greater Sydney and for New South Wales—a vision that is economically, financially, environmentally and socially sustainable. The Opposition would promise anything and not worry about matching infrastructure. The best it can do is whatever talkback radio personalities tell it to do. Those opposite cannot think for themselves. Opposition members even hinted to Rossmore Public School that flood-prone land could be rezoned for development. The Government is on the right track. The Federal Treasurer is totally wrong and should be condemned for his position. His fellow travellers in New South Wales also stand condemned, notwithstanding their attempts to wriggle out of it.

**Question—That the words stand—put.**

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 47**

Ms Allan	Mr Gaudry	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Amery	Mr Gibson	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Mr Greene	Mr Pearce
Mr Bartlett	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Mr Hickey	Ms Saliba
Mr Black	Mr Hunter	Mr Sartor
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Chaytor	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Collier	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Mr Corrigan	Ms Meagher	Mr Whan
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Yeadon
Mr Daley	Mr Mills	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	Mr Ashton
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	Mr Martin

**Noes, 33**

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mr Souris
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr McTaggart	Mr Tink
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr Torbay
Mr Draper	Ms Moore	Mr J. H. Turner
Mrs Fardell	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire
Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Seaton	

**Question resolved in the affirmative.**

**Amendment negatived.**

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! It being after 4.15 p.m., under sessional orders the House would normally proceed to general notices followed by private members' statements. As a consequence of the question not having being put on the substantive motion, the motion lapses. Should the House require it, with concurrence I will put the question on the original motion.

**Mr Chris Hartcher:** Concurrence is not granted.

**Motion lapsed.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Notices of Motion**

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! It being after 4.15 p.m. the House will now deal with General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices).

**General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.**

## **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

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### **Homebush Shopping Village**

**Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE** (Strathfield) [4.30 p.m.]: I wish to draw to the attention of the House the results of a campaign I have been organising with the great support of many local residents and shopkeepers in the electorate of Strathfield. It concerns the Homebush shopping village in Rochester Street. Recently, a proposal was lodged with Strathfield Council to build a mixed commercial development for the site located behind the Homebush shopping centre at 32 The Crescent, Homebush. This proposed project caused, and is still causing, great alarm in our local area because of its potential effect on local residents and small businesses.

The House may recall that several months ago what I had suspected and raised in this Chamber has in fact eventuated, as I predicted. The applicant had indeed had several pre-lodgement meetings with council. Many local shopkeepers and residents were not told about this. One has to wonder why. To add insult to injury, Strathfield Council then decided to notify a very narrow and limited group of residents about it—and, guess when, during the school holidays. On the other hand, the current mayor says council, under his control, is following an open and transparent process. But locals tell me they know nothing about it at all. I believe the local residents.

Only after huge pressure overall by locals was brought to bear on council and the current mayor the exhibition period was extended and an independent consultant was to be appointed to review this matter. Council has a proposal that, when there are a number of objections to a proposal, it must be considered by council, not by council officers under delegation. Thank goodness, as a result of local community action, we managed to get the exhibition process extended so that there could be ample time for residents to view the development application and forward their opinions.

But the fight did not stop there. Again the local community held a public meeting in the town hall and also at Homebush in the local school grounds. I might add that one of the local hard-working shopkeepers is also paying out her own money to have a private consultant assist in making a detailed report on this to council. I attended both those meetings, which were well attended, and again reiterate what I heard there from locals—height and bulk, excessive loss of privacy and local amenity, parking problems, noise, overshadowing, high-hazard flooding, to name but a few! In other words, this is an absolutely gross overdevelopment in this beautiful little area. Recently, the mayor sent out a letter trying to explain council's approach. Honourable members can guess how much that printing exercise and delivery cost local residents. This was money that council could have spent in a better way, such as fixing up some of the terrible footpaths in parts of this area.

Local residents, particularly seniors, have often complained to me about tripping on them. The mayor says in his letter:

The notification process in this instance has been quite extensive with more than 600 residents advised of the proposal well in excess of council's guidelines.

What poppycock! Locals advise that the process is appalling. But what would one expect from a rudderless ship! This proposal could affect thousands, not just those who live in Homebush but those who love to go there to shop. The mayor had every opportunity, if he really wanted to, to write to the Minister for Planning to have this area rezoned in such a way to prohibit commercial developments there. That has not happened. The local environmental plan is only a draft and can be altered. Many other councils, some of them nearby, are doing just that. At times they have had local environmental plans amended. The fight has only just begun. I have sent many letters to council from residents who wrote to me objecting to this proposal. I put on record my sincere thanks to all the residents who have written to me about this. But we must be vigilant and keep up the pressure on the mayor and Strathfield Council to ensure that our local area is preserved for all to enjoy.

I must finish my private member's statements with some good news for locals. The *Strathfield Scene*, which is a fantastic local community newspaper, now has a little sister, or brother, the *Burwood Scene*, which is delivered in the Burwood municipal area. I have received lots of positive responses from residents in Burwood who have told me how absolutely delighted they are with this local community newspaper. It has a breath of local stories and keeps up to date with local issues. It is a non-political in its intentions and I believe that one of the fabulous aspects of living in our great democracy is the advantage of having freedom of the press and all the choices that implies. I commend the editor and staff of this newspaper. I have always enjoyed reading the *Strathfield Scene*; now I can also enjoy reading, along with the local residents, the *Burwood Scene*. I wish them all the very best on their further issues.

### SHOALHAVEN COASTAL PATROLS

**Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK** (South Coast) [4.35 p.m.]: This evening I praise the dedicated men and women whose voluntary efforts in coastal patrol organisations in the Shoalhaven are all too often taken for granted and who are all in need of additional government support to continue the vital services they perform. Of course, coastal patrol organisations operate up and down the coast of New South Wales, but in my electorate we have three—the Shoalhaven Marine Rescue Association, situated at Greenwell Point, the Sussex Inlet Coastal Patrol and the Ulladulla Coastal Patrol.

Members of those organisations risk their lives to perform rescues at sea, usually under treacherous and dangerous conditions. They are part of the wider network of volunteers in the Shoalhaven who happily give their time and energy to serve the boating communities in their area. They all rely on donations from clubs, the local council and their own members, who sell raffle tickets, operate shops such as those in Sussex Inlet and Ulladulla, run markets and raise money for expensive equipment, uniforms and facilities. Without their efforts, the cost to the taxpayers of New South Wales would be exorbitant. Without these men and women, the lives of other men and women would be threatened, and perhaps lost. They need our help.

Due to changes in the Marine Act, regulations require coastal patrols to update and upgrade their boats and, in some cases, to purchase new ones. Little assistance came to the organisations despite the cost imposed by those legislative changes. Far less assistance is given to the coastal patrols than is given to the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service or even the surf lifesaving associations, all of which struggle every year to maintain the facilities and standards expected of them by the Government and the community.

I wish now to refer to a letter from a member of the Ulladulla division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol who wrote to the Minister for Ports and Waterways, the Hon. Joe Tripodi, on 15 June. This letter describes another serious issue facing coastal patrol members, and I am raising the issue in Parliament this afternoon so that Government members might pay attention and heed the warnings, advice and requests of the association. It writes:

I am a member of the Ulladulla Division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal patrol and I am writing to you to express my concern at charges which are levied against the Patrol by NSW Government Agencies ...

As you are no doubt aware, the royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol is an organisation devoted to safety at sea, and our division is accredited with the State Rescue Board. We are a purely volunteer organisation and receive very little funding from the State Government.



Under State legislation we are required to have our vessels up to the equivalent of survey standard. Before I retired I worked in the marine area and of course have no complaints in this regard, however the division is currently going through the process of having our category 3 vessel surveyed by NSW Maritime and I was shocked when I was advised that before any inspections were carried out that a payment of over \$3700 was required. In addition to this we also have to pay annual registration fees.

Since the abovementioned survey fees have been paid we have received a further letter from NSW Maritime stating that there may be further charges made if all required details are not available when the inspection is made.

As an organisation, most of our work is at the request of and under the control of another NSW Government agency, namely the NSW Police. All costs incurred by the division are borne by the division, with no recompense for fuel etc forthcoming from your government.

The division relies heavily on the generosity of local business and individuals, as well as a lot of time spent by members in fund raising events. To be hit with charges like those mentioned above adds unnecessarily to the cost burden of running the division and takes money away from necessary purchases such as additional safety equipment or upgrading of outdated equipment.

Recent expenses have placed a heavy drain on our resources and to have this mandatory expense added to our already drained resources incurs some ire from myself and other members.

I would be pleased if you could review this matter with the view of waiving survey costs to us and similar organisations.

This letter from a member of the Ulladulla division talks about survey costs, which are just one of the costs faced by coastal patrols. I am sure the honourable member for Kiama would support his coastal patrols, as we all do. Members of Parliament who represent electorates up and down the coast know only too well the work done by coastal patrols in very dangerous situations. Recently the Ulladulla Coastal Patrol was called out in treacherous conditions. The role coastal patrols play became the subject of intense media scrutiny. As I said earlier, coastal patrols get far less assistance from the Government than the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service, and the surf lifesaving movement. All of them should be much better supported by the Government to ensure their long-term viability and to ensure that they can continue to provide services. We should value more the volunteer efforts of all those who serve in our coastal patrols.

#### **MR AND MRS BELLAVIA AND BLUE HAVEN POOLS**

**Mr PAUL LYNCH** (Liverpool) [4.40 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the horrors and atrocities inflicted on Mr and Mrs Bellavia as a result of their trying to have a pool built at their home by Blue Haven Pools. Mr and Mrs Bellavia are constituents of mine who live in the suburb of Hinchinbrook. Building a pool in Hinchinbrook is hardly an extraordinary or surprising experience; it certainly happens often enough. However, in this instance the experience has hardly been ordinary. The house of their dreams was turned into a nightmare. What should have cost \$28,000 has so far cost \$75,000, with no end in sight. The Bellavias had to raid their children's accounts to find the money to meet these increased expenses. The cause of the problem is that Blue Haven did not build what it was contracted to build. My constituents wanted a pool flush with the ground surface, which, one would have thought, was hardly surprising. It would have been, one would have thought, the normal course. However, after the work commenced it became clear that the top of the pool would protrude significantly above ground level, which would hardly be an ideal look, and it certainly was not what the Bellavias had asked for.

When Blue Haven were first on the site they met with Mr Bellavia, and an indicative diagram of the site of the pool was prepared. When the height of the pool became an issue the diagram was again produced, this time with a series of extra markings and measurements. When the Bellavias had last seen the document no such markings were on it. They were added surreptitiously, at a later date, in an attempt to justify the work that Blue Haven was doing. In November 2004 the matter was taken to the Consumer Traders and Tenancy Tribunal [CTTT]. My understanding is that the CTTT was meant to be a quick, less formal, and less expensive alternative to traditional courts.

In this instance that does not seem to have been the case. It was not quicker and it certainly involved lawyers. Eventually the matter came on for hearing in May this year. The presiding member seems to have been most enthusiastic in attempting to persuade the parties to settle. He sent them out three times with an admonition to settle. The case did settle, but not before Mr Bellavia had given his evidence and not before the presiding member apparently said something about referring the site plan to appropriate authorities for investigation.

The settlement included various provisions relating to work being completed. Costs were reserved. Despite indications that the Bellavias would be able to recover at least a portion of their costs, the final order is that each party cover their own costs. This placed a further burden upon the Bellavias. This is not just the tale of a large construction company trying to trample over an ordinary householder by using a dodgy site plan. The

agreed settlement resulted in court orders that specified the work to be done by Blue Haven by a particular time. That time limit was not met. Blue Haven was in breach of the orders of the tribunal. It is not surprising that the Bellavias think there is one rule for them and one rule for everyone else. After the order Blue Haven sat on its hands for six weeks.

There are other problems. The Bellavias seem to have got precious little support from Fair Trading. Certainly their impression is that a senior Fair Trading bureaucrat went to work for Blue Haven. When my constituents complained to Fair Trading they thought that someone might have come out to inspect the site; at the very least they might investigate it. In fact, what seems to have happened is that they simply said the Bellavias should pursue it in the CTTT. Another problem encountered by the Bellavias is Blue Haven's use of private certifiers, which reduces the council's role to that of file keeping.

Granted Blue Haven has many sites to be inspected; its choosing the inspector must raise the possibility of a perception of a conflict of interest. A much better system might involve a random choice of private certifiers, similar to a cab rank system. The end result for the Bellavias is a system that seems to have treated them very badly. After 2½ years they got a two-day hearing in the CTTT, but they were told to go outside to settle. In their words, they feel that this has driven them into the ground. Blue Haven did not comply with the tribunal's orders in time. That shows contempt for the Bellavias and the tribunal, and it delays a final resolution.

It also caused great inconvenience for the pool-fencing contractor who was to do the work after the pool was completed. Whilst they were waiting for Blue Haven to comply with the orders, their dividing fence had to be taken down. Once again, that was not just inconvenient, but, with a big hole in the ground and no fencing, it was potentially quite dangerous. This matter has a fairly sad and unsatisfactory history. I ask the Minister for Fair Trading to look not just at the particular problems revealed by this story but at the general issues that arise out of it. I also ask the appropriate prosecuting authorities to look at the site plan to determine whether any proceedings ought result in the criminal court for fraud.

### KEMPSEY SHIRE COUNCIL

**Mr ANDREW STONER** (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [4.45 p.m.]: On 28 February, 9 March and 30 March this year I raised in this place a number of concerns that had been brought to me by members of the community in the Macleay Valley about the performance of the Kempsey Shire Council. Among those concerns were expenditure on the Point Plomer Road, the customer first centre that is being built by the council, the debt level of the council, the sacking of one of the council directors, tender processes, the sale of public lands, and other matters. Subsequently, on 28 March I received a response from the Minister for Local Government wherein he stated:

With this in mind, officers of the department are working with council to monitor its performance and implement recommendations from the review process. I can assure you that the situation at council will continue to be monitored.

Some five months on the complaints have not died down and the calls for an investigation under the Local Government Act have grown stronger, which is why I raise this matter today. On 5 June at about 8.30 in the morning Minister Hickey acknowledged on ABC radio that he had received a large number of complaints about a proposed rate rise by the council, as well as calls for an investigation into the council. These calls have continued. The local newspaper has been bombarded with a number of letters that raise various matters about the performance of the council. I quote from the *Macleay Argus* of 4 April:

The Ratepayers Associations across the Macleay Valley have united in objection to the special rate increase of 6 per cent in excess of the State Government allowed increase of 3.6 per cent as we believe:

6. The Kempsey Shire Council's incompetent financial management of ratepayers' funds is being condoned by this potential increase. It is reported that this Shire has the second worst debt ratio of any similar sized council in NSW.
7. Insufficient time has been allowed for the public to respond to the proposed increase.
8. This increase is already on top of the environmentally levy granted in 2004-05 which continues unaltered.

Another letter states:

This proposed rate increase comes on the back of a recently imposed environmental levy of over 10 per cent and I note that the much anticipated kerbside recycling initiative is yet to materialise—10 months later there is still no kerbside recycling for which we have already been levied.

It is time that council takes a tough stand on prudent financial management rather than penalise its constituents with a 9.6 per cent increase in rates.

Another letter in the same paper states:

What do we see but budget deficits going up from \$3.9 million in 2006-7 to \$4.7 million in 2008-9. Among the cuts we see a reduction in Water Supply Renewals of \$145,000—of course this means that our water mains will be in tip-top order and we won't have any water pressure problems or dirty water.

Our water charges will go up, our sewerage rates will go up, we may have to pay \$70 for a recycle bin. Then instead of us paying an extra 3.6% on our rates which was pegged by the State Government, our council wants more. Talk about double dipping, put up our rates and put up the charges.

It was interesting to read in Friday's *Argus* that they cancelled a shade cloth for the Hat Head Community Centre.

How much would it have cost? Would it have cost the same as the trip that the GM and the Mayor are taking to Queensland? A few more trips like this and the \$540,000 from our rate rise won't have a lot left for the bridge repairs and road maintenance.

There are a number of similar letters questioning the performance of the council. The combined ratepayers group, which includes associations from South West Rocks, Crescent Head, Hat Head and Kempsey, issued a survey in June-July which found that 1,554 people were opposed to the proposed rate rise and only 34 supported it. Among those asked whether an inquiry should be undertaken, 1,402 said yes, and only 91 said no. Comments were also made in the surveys about an inquiry being needed into the absence of consultation. Other comments were, "Shape up or ship out", and a number of comments pointed out that the community deserves respect from the mayor, councillors and administration staff, and that community wishes were being ignored. "Sack the lot" was an often-repeated comment regarding the councillors and administration staff.

In addition to referring to those comments, I have tabled a number of petitions in the House calling for an investigation into the council. Since then a number of other concerns have been raised with me by the community, including the use of credit cards, cheque warrants, attendance at conferences, the use of frequent flyer points, and the cost of the cemetery at Yarravel. I believe the ratepayers of the Kempsey Shire Council have lost confidence in the council. I again wrote to the Minister on 12 May seeking an investigation. I have provided the Minister with documents. I await an investigation and response from the Minister for Local Government.

### GRAYS POINT PUBLIC SCHOOL COMPUTERS

**Mr BARRY COLLIER** (Miranda) [4.50 p.m.]: Persons in public life should at least check their facts before making statements in the media. The same is true for members of Parliament. If they do not bother to check the facts, they run the risk of misleading the House. If they inadvertently mislead the House, they have a public duty to correct *Hansard* as soon as possible after becoming aware of having done so. That is what honest politicians do, regardless of experience or personal embarrassment. On 9 August we had the spectacle of an enraged, vanity-driven senior member of Parliament flying off the handle and making misleading statements in the Federal Parliament before bothering to check the facts. When his error was pointed out to him by me within two and a half hours of his statement to the House of Representatives, did he go back into the House and correct the error? No! He used slightly different words in the media from those he used in Parliament to try to cover up the fact that he had misled the House.

What was an angry statement made in Parliament without checking the facts became a lie in the local newspaper. This is a lie that the member of Parliament is happy to perpetuate, regardless of whom he hurts, just to feed his boundless ego and to make a mindless political point. The Federal member for Cook, Bruce Baird, has made a complete goose of himself by misleading the Federal Parliament and attacking me over claims about computers at Grays Point Public School. Baird's super-ego has made him jump to conclusions without first checking the facts. When he knew he had misled the House, he did not correct the record and he did not apologise. No, the frustrated Mr Baird made a statement to the media which he knew to be wrong to avoid the embarrassment of correcting *Hansard*.

On Tuesday 8 August the Premier, the Minister for Education and Training and I visited Grays Point Public School. The Premier delivered books to the library as part of his Reading Challenge. He also launched the State Plan under the school covered outdoor learning area [COLA]. The Premier was warmly received by the children. It was a very special and very happy occasion for them and the school. In the school library we watched as delighted and enthusiastic year 4 pupils showed us how they were using animation on their laptop computers. The very next morning at 9.44 Bruce Baird complained in Federal Parliament that the Premier, the

Minister for Education and Training and I were seen on Channel 7 "admiring the new equipment" and "fawning over students as they sat in the school library at their brand new laptop computers which ... were actually paid for by ... the Federal education department". I ask members to note the word "actually".

After making his statement in Federal Parliament, a very angry Mr Baird phoned my Miranda office from Canberra and complained to my staff that he had been "gazumped". He told the staff that the Federal Government had paid for the computers we saw on television. He quoted the cost and said the State Government should not be taking credit for them. My staff contacted me. I made a quick inquiry. As it turns out, the computers he complained about were provided to Grays Point Public School by the State Government under its Technology for Learning Program, which is being rolled out in schools across the State. Neither the computer, the software program that the children were using nor the library was paid for by the Federal Government. I telephoned Mr Baird in Canberra, two and a half hours after his statement and explained this to him. I also advised him that the computers supplied by the Federal Government were being used by year 5 in another classroom, which was not visited by the Premier, the Minister for Education and Training, me, or Channel 7 on the day.

Knowing this, Mr Baird should have gone back to the House and corrected his statement. But no, he went to the media. The *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* dated 24 August quotes Mr Baird saying that computers "might" have been provided by the Federal education department. Again I ask members to note that the language has changed from the computers "actually" provided by the Federal Government to computers that "might" have been provided by the Federal Government. He knows full well that these particular computers simply were not provided by his Government. Therefore, "might" is a lie—and Mr Baird knows it. The fact is that the computers were not provided by the Federal Government. He misled the Parliament and upset the school community by his petty and pathetic behaviour. We were not admiring computers—Mr Baird's or anyone else's. We were admiring the fantastic work being done at the Grays Point Public School by our children and their teachers.

What does Mr Baird expect me to do when I visit a school in my electorate—check out which government provided the equipment in every classroom? Does Mr Baird expect our schools to label every piece of equipment with the supplier's name? Should I provide Mr Baird with a list of improvements, equipment and projects provided by the State Government before he enters school property and ask him not to look at it? Should I avoid looking at equipment provided by the Federal Government? Should we prevent Mr Baird from talking to teachers because their salaries are paid by the State Government? Should we prevent him from entering the school grounds because the State Government owns the land? I am pointing out the logical stupidity and the absurdity of the lie Mr Baird wants to perpetuate.

What was a delightful visit by the Premier to a beautiful school has been soured for parents by Mr Baird's petty ego-driven behaviour. I know it is hard for this vain Federal member of Parliament, but Mr Baird must now admit that he flew off the handle and made a mistake. He must now correct his statement in the Parliament and in the media because he knows both statements to be wrong. As of today, he has not done any of those things. He has not corrected his statement. He has not apologised to the parents or the students, and he has not corrected the statement he made to the media. He is happy to cast a cloud over what was a very happy and special occasion for young children, their teachers and their parents. No-one has tried to claim credit from Mr Baird. Mr Baird has really made a goose of himself this time. This is conduct unbecoming of a member of Parliament. The Hon. Bruce Baird really should be ashamed of himself.

**Mr MATT BROWN** (Kiama—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.55 p.m.]: I again record the thanks of this House to the honourable member for Miranda. His dedication to his electorate and his meticulous research of facts impresses the House. I am well aware of his great interest in the schools in his electorate as well as in education throughout the whole State. He is actively involved in education committees throughout New South Wales. What the public wants to hear is that governments are working together to provide the best educational opportunities for their children. I know the honourable member for Miranda is working toward achieving that end. It is pleasing that he has placed the facts of the matter on the record of this House. Hopefully, the type of pettiness he described will not be repeated.

#### **COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES AND PAT WITT**

**Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [4.56 p.m.]: This afternoon I draw the attention of the House to the Country Women's Association of New South Wales, which is a constituent society of the Associated Country Women of the World, particularly the Country Women's Association Hornsby and District Branch.

Later I will provide the House with details of the dedication of Pat Witt, who served as president of the Hornsby branch for many years and who currently is a patient in the Neringah Hospital as a result of a terminal illness. At the outset I will enlighten the Parliament about the functions of the Country Women's Association [CWA], which was formed in 1922.

In the first instance, most women joined the CWA out of friendship, but later welcomed the opportunity to work within their own communities and participate in various activities associated with membership. The CWA shares interests with women in other States and countries throughout the world. I am a member of the Hornsby branch. By virtue of membership of the CWA, any New South Wales woman will have a voice in her nation's affairs and an opportunity to assist the community. The aim of the CWA is to work to improve conditions for country women and children. No other organisation exists for that purpose. The CWA is the largest women's organisation in Australia. The objects are achieved by consulting governments in relation to the problems of health, education, transport, social services, the environment and other issues. Throughout the State, women meet regularly to discuss their problems and learn from each other the many skills associated with handicrafts, drama, music and self-improvement.

The aims and objectives of the CWA are broadly to improve the welfare and conditions of women and children in country areas, to draw together all women, girls and children, and to support schemes providing for medical research, scholarships, dealing with emergencies such as flood, fire and earthquake relief, international projects, units for the aged, residential clubs and accommodation at reasonable cost, holiday homes, local organisations such as hospitals, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and visiting committees in hospitals. Other aims are to promote international goodwill, friendship and understanding between women everywhere and to encourage development in regional areas.

Pat Witt has been a member of the Hornsby branch for many years and has been president for a significant proportion of her membership. She is 77. As I have already mentioned, she is currently a patient in the Neringah Hospital, which is a wonderful hospital in my electorate that provides excellent care. The entire staff of the hospital are to be commended on its high standard of care. Based on my experience in a Sydney home nursing service when I had a great deal to do with referring patients to Neringah Hospital, I have an unstinting respect for the hospital. Last Christmas, staff and patients were moved to Greenwich. Apparently that will happen again this year following the installation of airconditioning in the Greenwich wards, so I look forward to a return to Wahroonga.

The Hornsby branch of the Country Women's Association is very active. CWA groups across New South Wales study one country each year and this year it is Denmark. Last year it was Vietnam. The groups also run beanie competitions, sell jams, aprons and teapot cosies—the most famous one being that of the Australian flag. They also hire out their tearooms, an icon in the area. Woe betide anyone who wants to take that room away from the CWA. Pat Witt is a stalwart in the community; she has worked tirelessly for the CWA and many other groups in the community. She has a wonderful and loving family who are supporting her and are by her side in this very trying time.

Pat will be sadly missed. Her contributions cannot be quantified in relation to how many hours of dedication she has shown to the Hornsby branch of the Country Women's Association, how many dozen scones she has baked, or how many people she has welcomed to the tearooms. I pay tribute to her. The Country Women's Association provides many opportunities. It is involved in the study and investigation of pending legislation, it promotes primary produce and it is involved in wool promotion. It will certainly live on for many years to come.

### **PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE**

**Mr JOHN BARTLETT** (Port Stephens) [5.01 p.m.]: In the last week of August 2006 the Minister for Roads announced the preferred option corridor for the F3 to Raymond Terrace section of the Pacific Highway. People in my area call that the missing link. Over the past 25 years I have been involved in local and State Government. During that time the Raymond Terrace bypass has been completed at the cost of \$90 million, the Raymond Terrace to Karuah section was completed at a cost of \$90 million, and a couple of years ago the Karuah bypass was completed at a cost of \$123 million. At a time when the Federal Treasurer says that the State Government is spending too much on infrastructure, we still have missing links. What planet does he live on?

The section of the F3 to Raymond Terrace is fairly long, and involves a number of controversial options. Over the past couple of years I have met with local residents of the Heatherbrae area to hear their

concerns, and Port Stephens council has commented on its choice of preferred corridors. It is generally accepted in the Port Stephens community that the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] and the Minister for Roads have made the correct decision. I have had a number of phone conversations regarding the bypass. I have spoken with James Lowe, Tony Shepherd and Walter Berry, who also sent in email to my office congratulating the Government on its final decision.

I have been very supportive of the Heatherbrae bypass. Instead of using the existing Pacific Highway corridor to Raymond Terrace the new corridor will go to the east of the Heatherbrae industrial and residential areas. Another interesting site is the Hexham Bridge crossing of the Hunter River. The RTA is proposing a long bridge that crosses the existing railway line coming from the Hunter Valley, crosses the New England Highway and then the Hunter River and some wetlands to join onto the existing corridor. Although I have no engineering background whatsoever, in media interviews I have been asked about the cost of that preferred option. My view is that it will cost between \$12 million and \$15 million per kilometre, and the total cost will probably be between \$250 million and \$300 million after State and Commonwealth funding is applied.

Presently the New South Wales Government does not own the corridor; it has been put in place by the RTA after consultation with various landowners. Over the next few years that process will continue, with the land being transferred to the RTA. The design, which is coming up to speed, will allow the engineering to take place, and then the construction will commence. The beauty of the bridge that crosses the Hunter River at Hexham, the railway line and the New England Highway, is the breaking of the mix on that section around the existing Hexham Bridge, which is a real bottleneck. From the Hunter Valley the New England Highway goes into Newcastle, and Maitland-Singleton residents travel backward and forwards to Newcastle, where the Pacific Highway from Sydney starts. In that five to seven kilometre section there is a lot of traffic mixing, and that should be avoided.

The F3 to Raymond Terrace extension will allow that traffic to be separated. Traffic from Sydney to Brisbane will not have to mix with the Maitland-Newcastle traffic, a growth area, or with the New England Highway traffic approaching the Hunter area. All in all, I am very pleased with the results of the preferred route options produced by the Minister for Roads and the RTA. Judging by the contacts made to my office and to myself the residents of Heatherbrae seem delighted with the Government's decision.

**Mr MATT BROWN** (Kiama—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.06 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I respond to the contribution of the honourable member for Port Stephens. He and I were elected to this place in the same year and I have been informed that he will not seek re-election next March. I place on record the enormous contribution he has made to his community. I have enjoyed listening to his contributions to debate in this place, and he has made good use of the opportunity to make private members' statements. His interest in the roads in his electorate is to be commended. To have that corridor aligned as it will be is the result of a lot of hard work by the honourable member for Port Stephens. He has informed the House of the traffic congestion and problems surrounding the area and I know he will fight for a great outcome for his constituents right up until election day and, of course, he will work with Aaron Beasley. I wish the honourable member for Port Stephens all the best.

### **ORANGE HIGH SCHOOL MOBILE PHONE PRANK**

**Mr RUSSELL TURNER** (Orange) [5.07 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a letter I have received from Christine Cornish of 4 Birinta Place, Orange. She wrote:

Dear Mr. Turner,

My son, Aaron, is a year nine student at Orange High School. On 6 June 2006, Aaron sustained a fractured left clavicle (collarbone). This occurred on the premises of Orange High School, during school hours. It was a deliberate act of violence, set up as a mobile phone 'prank'.

The idea behind the prank is that one student (Student A) pushes another student (Victim), while a third student (Student B) films the prank on his mobile phone.

What transpired on the day was that during recess, Student A ran at Aaron from behind, then lunged at him with such force that Aaron was knocked to the ground. Student B filmed the incident.

Being shocked and dazed, he was unaware that he was seriously injured, much less filmed. Nonetheless, Aaron went to the school nurse. He was immediately rushed to the hospital emergency room at Orange Base where he was diagnosed with a broken clavicle. Meanwhile, Student B took much delight in showing his friends how funny the video was on his phone.

It wasn't until two days later (Aaron did not return to school, as he was sedated and unable to move), that I found out from one of Aaron's friends that the incident was 'set up' as a prank.

I immediately called the school and reported it to the Vice Principal. Funnily enough, she was already aware of the incident, as she had viewed it with her own eyes on Student B's mobile phone. I immediately demanded that the video be wiped from his phone.

On the 8th of June I received a visit from Student A's mother apologising for her son's behaviour. I accepted her apology, as at that time, I did not realise the extent of the damage to Aaron's shoulder and collarbone. I never heard from Student B, nor his parents.

Aaron was not able to attend school from 6th June-21st July (5 weeks total, as school holidays fell in the middle).

Aaron's fracture is healing improperly. It is healing as an overlap, which means that he will forever be scarred with this senseless incident. His left shoulder will be shorter than the right, causing problems such as less strength, movement, mobility, and flexibility. He will possibly also suffer increased back pain in his upper back due to the decreased range of motion. He will forever have a lump on his clavicle, where the bone overlaps.

Our treating GP has referred us to a physiotherapist for additional treatment. This care is being paid out of pocket by me, as I don't have private health insurance. Between our doctor's and physiotherapist's visits, not to mention the time I required off work as I am the sole parent, this incident has left me with the financial burden.

We have spoken with the Victim's Compensation Administration about the incident. Because Aaron is a minor, he is not eligible for compensation of any kind. We have reported the incident to the police (Event # E28600608) and they have the full details of the two boys. The incident will be placed into their record.

I have chosen not to pursue legal action at this time, as it would be a fruitless effort. I do believe that the student's parents should reimburse my out of pocket expenses. If my dog attacked another dog in the street, I would expect to pay their vet bills, wouldn't I? This was not an 'accident' in the schoolyard.

I endeavoured to have the school organise a meeting with the parents of the two boys, myself and the principal of Orange High School. Student A's mother refused a meeting, as she 'had apologised' already.

Student B's mother (a staff member at Orange High School) refused to attend a meeting as well because her son did not push Aaron, he only filmed (and instigated) the incident! I wonder about her personal ethics as an employee of Orange High School, if her attitude toward a crime (filming someone without their permission) is so nonchalant.

I recently read an article in the CWD [*Central Western Daily*] "City targeted as assault hot spot" (Tuesday 1 August 2006), wherein Premier Morris Iemma "has announced a police and community partnership plan to help drive down the growing assault rate in Orange". This was an assault on my child.

You can imagine that if this same incident happened in the workplace, the perpetrators would be sent to jail, or sued at the very minimum. That Aaron is a minor, he has no recourse. That is a shame. I ask that all politicians and school administrators look seriously at the implications of violence and bullying in our schools from the victim's point of view, and restore the rights of victims. Our children should be able to enjoy a safe and friendly environment while at school.

Sincerely,  
Christine Cornish

### **ALICE ADELAIDE FITZPATRICK**

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS** (Peats) [5.12 p.m.]: I place on the parliamentary record a resumé of the amazing life of Alice Adelaide Fitzpatrick. Alice resided on the Woy Woy peninsula from 1996 until her death on 10 June 2006, at the remarkable age of 106 years or, as Alice would have said, "in my 107th year". Alice was reportedly the longest surviving First World War widow in Australia. Born Alice Simpson on 7 August 1899 at Waterloo, an inner Sydney city suburb, Alice commenced school at Kurri Kurri in the Hunter region in 1905. The family moved to Pelaw Main and Alice finished her schooling at Tea Gardens at the age of 14 years. The family then moved to Sydney at the outbreak of World War I.

In 1919 Alice married Gallipoli veteran James Fitzpatrick and the couple had six children, with all but the first being home births. Being a very resourceful person, Alice made all her own and her children's clothes, the only exception being their socks and stockings. Alice was widowed in 1952 when James died aged 57 years of injuries incurred during his army service in World War I. Alice never remarried. The third child was born with club feet, and I understand that Alice walked quite long distances to and from Camperdown Children's Hospital with her infant son to ensure that he received the then available treatment for his condition. Alice became a foundation member of the Crippled Children's Association. To her great credit and undoubtedly due to her perseverance, her son was able to overcome his affliction and was accepted into the Australian Army in 1940.

When Alice's husband, James, was diagnosed with throat cancer in 1949, Alice was forced back into the work force to support the family. Alice worked at Selby shoes in Redfern until 1970, when she retired at the age of 71 years. Retirement from the paid work force did not mean that Alice put her feet up for the next 36 years. Nothing of the sort! Retirement simply meant that Alice now had more time to devote to her favourite charities. That charitable work included the Meals on Wheels depot at Newtown, known as Number 9 Community Centre, where Alice waited on tables and worked in the kitchen. In the 1970's Alice joined the Marrickville RSL sub-branch women's auxiliary and remained an active member of the auxiliary until moving to Umina within the Peats electorate in 1990.

Alice wasted no time in setting up a fund to facilitate the purchase of a cobalt machine for the use of Central Coast residents in the treatment of cancer. The Australian Red Cross was another organisation to which Alice devoted much of her time and energy. In July 2003 Alice was awarded a 10-year service medal by the Umina Beach branch of the Red Cross. In 1997-98 Alice joined the local branch of Legacy, the Ettalong war widows' Guild and Woy Woy Ettalong Hardys Bay RSL sub-branch women's auxiliary, and remained an active member of each of these organisations right up to the very end. Blessed throughout her life with good health, Alice underwent her first operation in March 2006 for the removal of a skin cancer on her nose. Alice lived in her own home prior to her admission to hospital in February 2006. Upon her discharge, Alice resided with her only surviving child, her daughter, Gloria Peachey, herself a Second World War widow. Gloria was a devoted and loving daughter to her mother.

It was customary each year for Alice to organise her own birthday party at her local club, Ettalong Memorial Bowling Club. Alice would invite all her family and many friends. Alice's ballroom dancing abilities were well renowned. After her husband's death, she went dancing six nights a week. One of my fondest memories of Alice was when she danced with well-known Australian entertainer Lucky Starr at last year's seniors' barbecue and concert, which I hosted at the Ettalong War Memorial Club. Sadly, Alice passed away on 10 June 2006 due to kidney failure. She is survived by Gloria, 24 grandchildren, 46 great-grandchildren and 31 great-great-grandchildren, to whom I extend my deepest sympathy. Alice's wake was held the Ettalong Memorial Bowling Club, and at the same venue on Saturday 5 August a celebration of Alice's long and fulfilling life was held. Her life spanned the Boer War, two world wars, an influenza pandemic and the Great Depression. Vale Alice Adeliade Fitzpatrick.

## PARKINSON'S DISEASE

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL** (Clarence) [5.17 p.m.]: Today I talk about Parkinson's disease and the Parkinson's New South Wales Inc. support group. I received the following letter from Mrs Jean Lee in my electorate:

Dear Mr Cansdell,

We have been asked to pass on this request to our local member of Parliament. Parkinson's really does take its toll on families and we are desperate for more funding to enable help to be provided. As my husband has it I am quite well aware of the consequences. Things won't get any better. If you could put a petition to Parliament it would be greatly appreciated. I know money is always in short supply but when we see money being wasted by government it is very disappointing that our organisation is struggling.

Sincerely,  
Jean Lees.

Parkinson's disease was known as "shaking palsy" in the early in 1800s. It is a degenerative neurological condition. Over the past decade the disease has been given an especially high profile by celebrities who have been affected by it, such as the movie star Michael J. Fox; one of the greatest sportsman to put his feet on the planet, Muhammad Ali; Pope John Paul; and the recently deceased Don Chipp, a former leader of the Australian Democrats. Approximately 100,000 people worldwide suffer from Parkinson's disease, 35,000 of them in Australia. It is the second most common degenerative neurological condition after Alzheimer's disease. It affects men and women equally and is more common in people over 50 years of age. However, it can occur in younger people.

Approximately one in 10 people diagnosed are under 40 years of age. Parkinson's New South Wales, the support group, is a peak body for people living with Parkinson's disease. For every person diagnosed with the disease at least seven others are directly affected—partners, families, carers, et cetera. The four major symptoms of Parkinson's disease are tremor or shaking, stiffness, slowness of movement and difficulty with



balance. Other symptoms include lack of facial expression, depression, anxiety and fatigue. At this stage there is no known cause, cure, or diagnostic tool for Parkinson's disease.

The aim of Parkinson's New South Wales is to ease the burden and find a cure. The organisation provides—free of charge—information, education, encouragement and support for people living with this disease and their families and carers. Its services include advocacy; information and education for health professionals, people living with Parkinson's disease and their partners, families and carers; awareness events; a 1800 information line, which is often the first point of contact for people living with Parkinson's disease and which provides structures and accurate information, advocacy and services; a Parkinson's specialist counselling service; and support groups across New South Wales. There are close to 45 such groups and that number grows each year.

To date, Parkinson's New South Wales has received no government funding. Its sister State organisations in Queensland and Victoria receive recurrent government assistance. Parkinson's New South Wales desperately needs our help. The organisation requires safe and adequate premises. At present Parkinson's New South Wales is located at Concord hospital in offices that are becoming inadequate and unsafe. They are an occupational health and safety nightmare. Some of the organisation's staff and many of its volunteers live with Parkinson's disease and require bulky walking aids to assist with mobility. The lack of space also makes it very difficult for the organisation to offer counselling to sufferers of the disease. A capital grant or an ongoing rental subsidy is needed to address this problem.

Recurrent funding is a major priority if Parkinson's New South Wales is to continue offering its current level of free services. In addition, the organisation has identified the need to expand services in all its areas of work, such as increasing the number of support groups, expanding counselling services, and providing more information and education for health professionals. The organisation also needs more staff to handle the volume of work. Without the efforts of Parkinson's New South Wales the quality of life of all those impacted by the disease would be greatly reduced. The cost of all this work is significant and the ongoing future of the organisation and the continuation of the services it provides are in jeopardy without government funding. Parkinson's is an insidious disease and its management would cost NSW Health much more if Parkinson's New South Wales did not exist. Government assistance is required urgently to enable Parkinson's New South Wales to continue to provide quality services to all those impacted by the disease.

### WOONGARRAH PUBLIC SCHOOL

**Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN** (Wyong) [5.22 p.m.]: On 17 August it was my very pleasant duty to attend the opening of Woongarra Public School, in the suburb of Woongarra, which is a fast-growing area of my electorate. In only its second year of operation, the school has 275 students. A sheet bearing each student's name was produced to commemorate the official opening and to connect every student with the ceremony. The Minister for Education and Training officiated at the opening. The school is the result of a public-private partnership, and its buildings and facilities are certainly of a very high standard. The community is very accepting of the school and a tremendous school spirit has developed in a very short space of time.

In introducing the Minister I pointed out that the site of Woongarra Public School was decided co-operatively by the State Government and Wyong Shire Council. This occurs only rarely. The school was originally to be located some 300 metres to the east of its present site. However, it was decided that the school should be built at its present location near council playing fields to increase the playing area for the children and the community. It was synergy. I was most pleased with that outcome as the former site suffered from flooding.

As well as 275 students the school has 32 teachers and administrative staff. I was pleased to see on staff some well-respected teachers from other schools in my electorate, such as Peter Thompson, who has transferred to Woongarra from Blue Haven Public School. Peter is an excellent teacher who takes a keen interest in sports. He told me that he intends to continue to pursue that interest at Woongarra Public School. Trudy Pierpoint, previously of Toukley Public School, is also on staff. In fact, she devised the school song, which is:

Next to the wetlands is Woongarra Public School  
Where we strive to obey the four rules:  
'Be Safe, Be Kind, Be Fair, Be Great'  
That's what we need to do  
To make this school a better place  
For me and for you.

Woongarra Public is our school.  
 'Think, Dream, Believe, Achieve,'  
 That's what we need to do.  
 We'll always help each other,  
 In everything we give,  
 To make this world a better place  
 In harmony to live.  
 To make this world a better place  
 In harmony to live.

That was certainly the feeling that those present took away from the opening. The school is a co-operative environment and everyone makes a contribution. The parents and citizens association has already done a great deal for the school. Association president Mr Tom Heron and the executive arranged to have medallions struck to commemorate the school's opening. Each student received a medallion, which they wore proudly on the day. I suspect that many of them will bring those medallions when they return for their school reunion in 25 years.

Woongarra is a wonderful school and I congratulate everyone involved with its development. I kept it to myself, but I was initially a little sceptical about the public-private partnership arrangement. However, I am pleased with the result. In 2003 I pointed out to the then Minister for the Central Coast, the Hon. John Della Bosca, and the co-ordinator from the Premier's Department, Leonie Baldwin, that we needed to be aware of demographic changes in the area to ensure that we provide adequate school facilities. I hope that those studies have been undertaken. The Hon. John Della Bosca is very well organised and I am sure that he would have arranged for that research to be conducted. I am certain also that his successor, the honourable member for The Entrance, has followed his lead and ensured that school planning for demographic changes in the area has occurred.

### CHATSWOOD COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN** (Willoughby) [5.27 p.m.]: In 2004 the then Minister for Health made the detrimental decision to close community-based mental health facilities at Chatswood, which impacted, and continues to impact, on my electorate of Willoughby. Since October 2004 the community has been extremely distressed and concerned about this decision. On Saturday 12 August a community forum was held in Willoughby to discuss the issue and to reiterate to the State Government that the community feels strongly that community-based mental health facilities should be returned to Hercules Street, Chatswood. I cannot tell honourable members how many concerned parents and carers have contacted my office and outlined their concerns about how this decision has impacted on their families. More than 300 sufferers and their families have been impacted directly by the decision but obviously carers, community representatives and other support workers are also affected.

In 2004 the State Government deemed it appropriate to close the mental health facilities at Chatswood and to relocate the community mental health team to the Royal North Shore Hospital campus. The entire purpose of community-based mental health facilities is to keep people out of hospital and to give them every opportunity to lead constructive and purposeful lives, with support in the community. Relocating services from Hercules Street, Chatswood, to Royal North Shore Hospital has had a most debilitating effect on many sufferers and their families on the lower North Shore, and in Willoughby specifically.

I place on record the motion that was passed at the public meeting on 12 August 2006. The meeting was well attended, and I was joined by community representatives, carers, members of rotary clubs and other community organisations, representatives of Willoughby City Council and many others who are extremely concerned about the decision. The meeting was also attended by mental health workers, who ordinarily would not make their feelings about such an issue so public. Employees of the Department of Health turned up to support what the community was doing because they felt so strongly about this issue. The four main points of the resolution passed at that meeting were:

1. The Willoughby community demands the immediate reinstatement of community mental health facilities at Hercules Street, Chatswood and ensure that the Hercules Street precinct is restored and enhanced as a centre of excellence for community health.
2. The Minister be requested to meet with a delegation from the meeting to ascertain a timeframe and future plan for the re-instatement of the community mental health facilities and the establishment of a centre of excellence for community health.
3. The Premier and Minister for Health be advised the community totally opposes sale of this community public land and seeks their commitment to retention of the land.

4. The meeting expresses its concern and anger at the continued failure of the Health Minister to provide replies, to hear views of the Willoughby community, and present the future and timeframe for reinstatement of the mental health services.

That resolution demonstrates the strength of feeling of people from very diverse backgrounds who are united on restoring mental health facilities in Chatswood. During 2004 both the honourable member for North Shore and I campaigned strongly for the retention of community based facilities at both Cremorne and Chatswood. We forced the Minister to hold community workshops in December 2004 to discuss the issue. We both put on record our concerns that the workshops were held, from memory, two or three days before Christmas. The response we got from the department nearly two years ago was that the workshops had to be held on that day because the matter was so urgent. If the matter was so urgent, and if the former Minister for Health, now the Premier, thought the matter was so urgent, why is it that nearly two years later we still do not have a resolution of this issue?

I have placed this concern on the public record in this House a number of times. I have moved motions and posed questions and got the same bland answers from the current Minister for Health that I received from his predecessor, that is, the Government is still considering its position. It is totally unsatisfactory that after nearly two years the Government has not reinstated community-based mental health facilities at Chatswood. Today's comment in this House on this issue reiterates that the community is not going quietly on this issue. We will continue to fight to bring back community-based mental health facilities to that centre. As I said, the meeting on 12 August was attended by a diverse range of community leaders, carers and supporters of people with a mental illness. They have demonstrated that in no way will we go quietly on this issue—quite the contrary. I take this opportunity to call on the Minister for Health to listen to the cries of the community and change his mind about the retrograde step in the diminution of community-based mental health facilities. [*Time expired.*]

### CHARLESTOWN BUSINESS CENTRE

**Mr MATTHEW MORRIS** (Charlestown) [5.32 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I provide an update on the current status of the Central Charlestown Business Centre, in particular, Charlestown's growth and renewal. After many months the Sky Central development has commenced. The current works are finalising the demolition of the old buildings on both of the sites. Previously the old Pickerings Arcade, which served the Charlestown community for many years, stood proud on the western side of the Pacific Highway. Construction work will result in the development of two towers, one on each side of the Pacific Highway in the order of eight and nine storeys. They will be linked by a footbridge over the highway connecting the two buildings and allowing people an alternative access across the highway. This development is another milestone for Charlestown's renewal.

In more recent years we have seen the establishment of the Alto building, which has set a new standard of facility for the suburb. The Sky Central proposal was supported because of the positive impact it would have on Charlestown, while providing further residential and commercial space in central Charlestown. The building outcome will fit well in Charlestown and will be of high quality, with appropriate building finishes and materials. I should note two other major projects in Charlestown are either approved or in the early stages of commencement. Both of those offer further residential components. Charlestown, after many years of debate, is now moving forward in its future role, becoming a major regional business and residential hub. Business growth has been steady with a slow but positive growth in retail outlets.

Only a short 12 months ago I had the pleasure of officially opening a branch of the Bank of Queensland in Charlestown with the manager, Mr John Wheeler. Other businesses have established themselves in Charlestown, including a fitness centre and a medical centre. The medical centre is purely a bulk-billing centre, which has provided an enormous benefit to the community that has been struggling for some time now to access general practitioners who are prepared to entertain bulk-billing arrangements with patients. A strong resident community is very keen to see a safe, accessible and functioning centre surrounds the Charlestown business centre. It has been pleasing to secure State planning funds to the tune of \$100,000 to partner Lake Macquarie City Council to prepare a master plan for Charlestown.

I can assure the House we would not have seen that funding under a Coalition government, nor would we have seen it with an Independent as the local member. The master plan is being developed with the council as the project manager in its development. I urge the council to give greater support for the plan and to get on with the process. Many issues need to be addressed as part of the planning process, such as transport, both private and public, pedestrian infrastructure and open space. On the future of Charlestown, the community is set to see a steady renewal, growth and expansion of services and facilities in the business centre. I am proud to

represent the community and I want to ensure all sectors of both the community and business see a positive bright future for Charlestown through suitable, sensible development such as the Sky Central project. I wish it well. Investment is the opportunity for renewal and economic growth, and given what we will see in Charlestown, the centre will be the significant regional hub in the Hunter servicing thousands of consumers.

Another key element with Charlestown's redevelopment is the critical issue of a bus interchange, which will need to be resolved in the master planning process. This important piece of infrastructure will need to be centrally located to service the entire commercial centre, purpose-built to offer protection from weather elements and complemented by other facilities and services. I look forward to participating in the planning process as time permits. The future for Charlestown is bright. However, it needs careful, balanced planning to ensure the best possible outcomes. As the need arises, I will be pushing Government to ensure we deliver and meet our obligations in supporting the provision of services and infrastructure. In due course, I will further update the House on Charlestown's progress as it moves forward. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous work of Jenny Barry, Secretary, of Business Charlestown Incorporated in building business in Charlestown.

### OLDER PEOPLE

**Ms CLOVER MOORE** (Bligh) [5.37 p.m.]: I refer to an issue that is of importance to many people in the city—the proportion of people aged over 65, which is expected to more than double over the next few decades. While some have referred to population ageing as a crisis, I believe that older people should not be seen as a drain on the community. As the 1998-2003 New South Wales Healthy Ageing Framework says:

Healthy ageing keeps all older people involved in society and enables their ongoing independence, participation and quality of life.

Community organisations appreciate the contributions older people make, such as the 19 per cent of carers who are aged over 65. The 2005 "Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia" report suggests that the ageing population will increase volunteerism from 1.8 to 2.1 per cent of the gross domestic product. Indeed, an ageing population could inspire a renewed force in community and welfare services. The Healthy Ageing Framework shows that the Government aims to provide healthy ageing initiatives, but there is lack of detail and funds to achieve this end. The recent increase in funds for the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care has not translated to expanded healthy and active ageing programs. Along with others, I called on the Government to improve support for people with disabilities and frail elderly people. However, I am concerned that the Government must also support healthy/active ageing and prevention programs. The promotion of Seniors Week and the Seniors Card is a useful but a minimal commitment to older people.

"Economic Implications for an Ageing Australia" predicts that the ageing population will dramatically increase spending demand for health, disability, and aged care services if current trends continue. However, pressure on health care, disability, and aged care services can be reduced. Research shows that social support, and gentle physical and mental activity greatly increases health and reduces the need for support services. Active engaged older people can also contribute to welfare and community support.

The Older Women's Network New South Wales, known as OWN, provides an exceptional model for healthy ageing programs, emphasising wellness instead of illness and encouraging members to stay healthy, stay connected, keep their dignity, and contribute their experience and wisdom to society. The network has 20 groups in New South Wales, four wellness centres, and approximately 1,500 older women engaging in programs planned and organised by them, including gentle exercise, tai chi, water exercise, "living wills", falls prevention, nutrition, skill care and dementia. A small grant enabled the network to run health workshops on issues of concern like elder abuse, financial problems, depression, grieving, social isolation, housing, and transport. Self-help groups, discussion groups and workshops empower older women to participate in decisions that affect them.

The network has developed creative initiatives, including acappella, play-reading, dancing, and helping create the Sydney Theatre Group, where older women entertain others. The network's newsletter informs members about programs and services that will help members get the help they need, and share strategies for negotiating with service providers. The network advocates on issues affecting older women, giving voice to many people who would not be heard otherwise. Network members carry out research to identify needs and then feed this into planning, providing valuable insight.

The 2006 "Kicking Up Autumn Leaves" report assessed the value of wellness programs under the supervision of the Northern Sydney-Central Coast Area Health Service, with older women the researchers as well as the focus of the research. It recommended that government should fund wellness centres with paid staff, provide space for older women and wellness activities in community venues. It endorsed the community development model pioneered by the network, which emphasises participant-driven activities.

The Hunter Positive Ageing Strategy project identified that employment and training, lifelong learning, the community setting, and information all affect older people's lives. The network has identified domestic violence and elder abuse as significant issues. The network has identified that computer training for older women would help them use this technology to inform themselves and participate in their community. I support the group's request for new services and resources to tackle these concerns. I know a number of constituents who are proud network members and organisers, and I commend their work.

The network receives limited funding from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and the Department of Health, and achieves a great deal with quite limited resources. It achieves so much because it is grounded in the expertise, experience and wisdom of older women. Many older people live active and independent lives, and they have skills and knowledge that can benefit the whole community. Groups like the network should be across New South Wales in all communities. Their report shows the value of positive ageing programs. I call on the Government to invest in programs for older people that help them remain active, healthy and a valued part of the community.

### CENTRAL COAST INTERNATIONAL GUITAR FESTIVAL

**Mr GRANT McBRIDE** (The Entrance—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for the Central Coast) [5.42 p.m.]: I wish to draw the attention of the House to a significant cultural event for New South Wales which begins on the Central Coast this Sunday, 3 September, at the Laycock Street Theatre. This weekend I will have the honour of officially opening the Central Coast's first International Guitar Festival, a weeklong festival incorporating more than 20 individual workshops and performances. The Central Coast is fortunate to play host to this festival, the second largest of its kind in Australia, surpassed only by the Darwin International Guitar Festival.

The aim of the festival is to promote and showcase classical nylon-stringed acoustic guitar and its vast array of music styles. The festival will also bring together the best guitar players from Sydney and regional New South Wales, and they will combine with a number of world-renowned musicians. This week-long celebration will kick off with an opening night concert featuring the talents of internationally-renowned Canberra based group Guitar Trek and special guest Rafael Andia from Paris. Opening night entertainment will also include the Sydney Guitar Trio and jazz legends Bob Barnard and Don Andrews.

The festival will feature a diverse range of events to cater for fine music lovers of all ages. Some events throughout the festival include Tango Passion, a cabaret-style performance paying tribute to Tango composer Astor Piazzolla; Fiesta Guitarras, a concert featuring the Wollongong Guitar Orchestra, Newcastle Guitar Company, Sydney Guitar Society Ensemble, Central Coast Guitar Consort and the G-Force Quartet; Jazz Legends; the Sydney Guitar Trio; and a solo recital by Rafael Andia. The festival will conclude with a special performance by the Central Coast Symphony Orchestra, led by Mr Christopher Bearman.

In addition to showcasing fine guitar performance the festival program will include a dedicated educational component. A Guitar Fun Day for schoolchildren will allow budding musicians to discover the history of the guitar and participate in workshops, tutorials, recitals and master classes. There will also be a number of additional activities involving guest speakers and composers in workshops, lecture recitals and guitar-making demonstrations.

I wish to make special mention of four local venues that will be hosting events throughout the festival. Without these venues this festival would not be possible. I extend my thanks to the Robert Knox Hall, the Central Coast Regional Art Gallery, Christchurch Anglican Church and the Laycock Street Theatre. Laycock Street Theatre, which falls within the boundaries of my electorate The Entrance, is the cultural hub of the Central Coast and has played host to a vast range of live events over many years. It is estimated more than 100 teachers, performers and music students will showcase their skills during the festival.

The festival's organiser, Mr Eric Cathan, is anticipating more than 1,500 people will visit the region throughout this event. I congratulate Mr Cathan for his hard work in co-ordinating the festival and also the

Central Coast Conservatorium, which has been heavily involved in the organisation of this event. The Central Coast Conservatorium, through the Department of Education and Training, as well as Gosford City Council, the Gosford Music Centre and the Classical Guitar Society of Sydney are all key sponsors of this event, and I congratulate all those organisations for their support.

Obviously this is an opportunity not to be missed and I encourage fine music lovers from across New South Wales, particularly those in Sydney and the Hunter, to make the trip to the Central Coast for this event. Gosford on the Central Coast, being only 75 kilometres from the Sydney central business district, is easily accessible and has a number of first-class accommodation and hospitality venues to take advantage of. I should point out that this is the first International Guitar Festival to be held on the Central Coast, and I encourage fine music lovers and the local community to support this event in order to ensure it remains a permanent fixture on the events calendar of the Central Coast.

### **COROWA HIGH SCHOOL VITICULTURE COURSE**

**Mr GREG APLIN** (Albury) [5.47 p.m.]: Corowa High School is unique in New South Wales. It is the only school in the State to make wine at school and to possess a vigneron licence. At 4.00 p.m. on Tuesday 1 August Corowa High School celebrated the acquisition of its vigneron licence with a tasting of the soon-to-be-released 2003 durif at Cofield Wines in Wahgunyah. It was a great occasion for the school community and the Corowa shire mayor, Councillor Gary Poidevin, joined teachers and the School Council President, Councillor Richard Lane, in congratulating the principal, Chris Johnston, and viticulture teacher Bryon Adamson on their success. Students were not allowed to attend the launch of the wine, nor taste their product, but they are all proud to be part of the viticulture course and for their school to receive the first school vigneron licence in New South Wales.

Viticulture started at Corowa High School in 2000 following the decision by former principal John Marshall to introduce a vocational education training viticulture course. Corowa is situated next to the Rutherglen wine region in Victoria and 20 wineries are located within 20 kilometres of the high school, so there was an obvious link to the local industry with the potential to develop significant employment opportunities. The project was driven by the school's agricultural teacher, Bryon Adamson, who first had to train himself in the subject before he could teach others. He enrolled in a TAFE course to learn about establishing vineyards and then worked in local vineyards during the school holidays to learn about planting, pruning and harvesting.

In 2000 the first vines were planted on four disused tennis courts. There were 215 durif vines, 175 shiraz and 70 viognier. While the original idea was to teach the growing of wine grapes, the school has taken the course to another level so students do almost everything in the winemaking process. The course now involves planting and pruning the vines, taking cuttings for potting, training vines, carrying out canopy management and harvesting the grapes by hand. The school then processes the grapes and students help in all aspects of production—crushing, fermentation, pressing, monitoring and barrelling. The wine is stored in barrels in a secure location at the school and bottled at Cofield Wines. It is important to note that the students are not permitted to taste or consume the product at any stage in the process.

The Wine Industry National Education Training and Advisory Council developed the course for students in years 11 and 12. It is a competency skills-based course, with students achieving an Australian Qualification Framework Certificate 1 in Food Processing (Wine). While the students work in the vineyard at school, many do work placements at local vineyards to gain greater competency and experience. For those wanting to continue their studies there are options at both Riverina Institute of TAFE and at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga.

One former Corowa High School student completing his studies of wine science at Charles Sturt University is David Whyte, the assistant winemaker at Cofield Wines in Wahgunyah. David previously studied agriculture at the high school under Bryon Adamson, and is now assisting his former teacher in the art of winemaking. He is enthusiastic about the course and says that it would have made a huge difference for him had it been available when he was at school. He recommends the industry to young people. Bryon Adamson says that, although the course does not count towards attainment of the Higher School Certificate, it has enormous relevance and is a great example of schools working with the community and industry, producing skilled workers who can become involved in local wineries.

The Rutherglen region's wineries have given tremendous support to the course as they see great potential for students to stay in the area and find employment in the local industry, which Winemakers of

Rutherglen chairman, Chris Pfeiffer, estimates as being worth about \$100 million. The school's first vintage was released in December 2002 but only 100 bottles were produced for students' families and staff. With the acquisition of the school's vigneron licence, viticulture teacher Bryon Adamson will now look to marketing the school's first commercial vintage, 80 dozen bottles of 2003 durif. Proceeds will be reinvested in equipment. To obtain the vigneron licence, the school principal, Chris Johnston, worked long and hard with the legal services branch of the Department of Education and Training to ensure that the operation of the school's vineyard and the production and sale of wine comply with department policy.

While students may only taste the grape juice, they enjoy all aspects of wine production, especially their considerable success at the annual Australian Schools Wine Show. Since 2004 Corowa High School has won three silver medals and a bronze medal for its durif and viognier wines. I have walked with Bryon Adamson through the vineyards at Corowa High School, talked to the students and encouraged the principal and staff in their endeavours to secure this vigneron's licence. Now I congratulate Corowa High School on a great achievement, and I wish the students success in obtaining gold medal recognition in future wine shows.

### **SMALL BUSINESS WEEK**

**Mr STEVEN PRINGLE** (Hawkesbury) [5.52 p.m.]: Most members of this House would have participated in the recent Small Business Week. I commend Australian Business Ltd, which incorporates the State Chamber of Commerce, on its initiative. I certainly enjoyed my time in a variety of Hawkesbury businesses. My first visit was to Greg Miller from Millers Turf Supplies. Greg's business lies on the banks of the Hawkesbury River on 210 acres of prime agricultural land that is vital to the Sydney region and most definitely needs to be preserved. Surrounding his property are other turf growers and vegetable growers who supply an important niche market in Sydney. Greg recently won the New South Wales Young Farmer of the Year Award for his innovation and enthusiasm. He is also president of the New South Wales Turf Growers Association. Greg's business is well established and supplies the famous Sir Walter buffalo grass that is hardy and looks good for much of the year, and is indeed ideal for the Australian climate.

Greg is the type of businessman we admire and encourage. He has a strong training program for his 12 employees, and he always encourages their development and input into his business. In the area of research and development he has been instrumental in developing a new type of grass that uses less water than conventional Australian grasses and, of course, is ideal for our drought-stricken country. He also produces products tailored to meet the market. For example, many councils require wider widths of grass and a product that is suitable for ovals in particular. Greg tailors his product to meet their needs.

Greg is also an exporter. It might be hard to believe but we in Australia can sell grass to other countries. Greg's product is loaded into refrigerated containers, which supplies much of the racecourse market in Malaysia and other countries. It is a great initiative and I wish him success in lots of other markets. Millers Turf Supplies is also negotiating with American business interests to introduce fully automated turf cutting and palletising, a system that is worth about \$350,000 per unit. This should take him further to the forefront of this vital industry. Keep up the good work, Greg.

I also had the privilege of visiting Nathan's Prestige Autobody Repairs at Rouse Hill and viewing firsthand a family owned company that is at the forefront of the industry. Not only does Nathan's repair cars; it also specialise in trucks and helicopters. With the increase in corporate mergers and takeovers, his business has plenty of work changing colour schemes and providing an upbeat corporate image that is well appreciated by the market. His involvement in helicopters is also very impressive to view as the frame needs to be completely cut back to base metal and then a variety of specialised paint coatings applied. Clearly, these are large and specialised items that have required serious investment from the Nathan family and a commitment to adopting modern technologies and always keeping up to date.

Current cars use alloys in their construction, which require specialised welding equipment often costing up to \$35,000 per unit. Nathan's has adopted this technology enthusiastically and appears to be at the forefront of all aspects of the industry. The Nathan commitment to the industry also includes employing a number of apprentices, many of whom form long-term relationships with the company and provide a valuable sounding board for new investments and for improving quality control and assurances.

I was also fortunate to spend time with Clarrie and Julia Nolland in their retail shoe business, Shoe Tree and Accessories at Round Corner. I also had the pleasure of spending time with Fitness First at Dural. Both companies are extremely customer friendly and well-run businesses. Fitness First took the plunge, and its

investment is extremely strong. It also provides a business that suits the market; it suits young mothers and people who like to attend early in the morning. It also provides crèche facilities. Noticeable with all these businesses is the high professional level of service they provide to their customers and to the wider community, and I commend them for the important aspects of their business. I thank all those businesses for providing me with an insightful experience during Small Business Week, and I wish them well. I thank them also for their contribution to the New South Wales economy and Australia in general.

### **TAMWORTH ELECTORATE HEALTH SURVEY**

**Mr PETER DRAPER** (Tamworth) [5.57 p.m.]: Tonight I draw the attention of honourable members to the results of a health survey I recently conducted across the electorate of Tamworth. My survey was undertaken at a similar time to a questionnaire sent to constituents in the electorate of Northern Tablelands by my colleague the honourable member for Northern Tablelands, Richard Torbay. Both were developed to gauge public perception regarding availability and delivery of local health services. All communities within both electorates are included in the Hunter-New England Area Health Service boundaries, so it will be interesting to compare the results.

The main areas of concern indicated by the many respondents in my area were as anticipated, with almost one-third expressing concern about a shortage of doctors and specialists. Many, particularly those from smaller towns, were waiting anywhere from two weeks to six months to see their local general practitioner [GP], while a large proportion of these people were forced to travel to larger centres that have increased resources to obtain an appointment. The problem is most prevalent in Gunnedah, a town of 10,000 residents that is located 80 kilometres west of Tamworth. Many respondents reported a severe shortage of GPs in the town, resulting in people who wished to see a GP often forced to queue outside doctors' surgeries from 6.00 a.m. to secure their appointment. This is an extremely concerning situation, given the large number of elderly residents living in Gunnedah. While city members of Parliament may not relate to this experience, I am certain that most members from country electorates see a similar scenario played out in their regional areas.

Not only do long-time residents face great difficulty accessing a doctor; people choosing to leave Sydney or other major centres to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of country life often find that doctors will not accept them as new patients. Many incidents were reported where new residents moving to Manilla, Barraba, Gunnedah and Tamworth found that local GPs had closed their books to new patients because their workload was already too large to properly service their existing patients. One elderly couple who moved to the electorate from a coastal centre were very distressed to discover they could not access a GP in Tamworth. As a result they were considering moving back to their previous location. A similar situation occurs when a doctor leaves town. Should a replacement not be found quickly that doctor's patients are often forced to wait until a new doctor arrives.

This critical doctor shortage has forced a number of residents with young families to move to larger centres where health resources are more prevalent. Many mothers detailed their experiences trying to get a young baby with a fever to see a doctor, but because of delays in obtaining an appointment they were forced to wait for many hours at the hospital emergency department. Recently my wife took one of our children to the emergency department in the middle of the night where, after a substantial wait, she received a diagnosis of croup. Unfortunately, the hospital had run out of the relevant medicine so they had to come home with instructions to return should the condition worsen.

The shortage of specialists is an area of concern raised by many people. Respondents detailed their experiences trying to access a specialist after being referred by a doctor. Having already waited weeks or longer to access their general practitioner, delays of three to 12 months were reported as common to access a specialist. Such long periods, while being inconvenient, also created a great deal of anxiety for the patient, particularly when waiting for a diagnosis of a potentially life threatening conditions such as cancer. Delayed diagnosis and treatment may increase the risk of a condition worsening. To reduce such risk and associated anxiety many residents travelled to larger centres like Sydney and Newcastle, which is a costly exercise given the record high fuel prices. For many elderly residents who lack the mobility, transport or funds to make such a journey, they had no option but to wait.

Dental services need immediate attention. A large number of elderly respondents expressed concern about the difficulty in accessing public dental services, and also the quality of those services. One gentleman who had been waiting 12 months to have his broken dentures replaced was recently advised that it would be a further two years before they would be fixed. It is unacceptable to wait so long for an essential procedure.



Nobody should be expected to live with such a problem for so long. The only other option for this person was a private dentist, but because he is a pensioner he could not afford one.

People are very pleased that a medical school will be developed at the University of New England. Some 300 doctors and 190 specialist nurses will be trained in rural medicine at any one time once the program is up and running. They are also pleased that both Tamworth and Armidale hospitals will be redeveloped to a teaching standard, which will help to overcome many of the current concerns about the provision of health care in the community. The issues I have raised today are snapshots of problems being experienced by people across country New South Wales. They highlight an urgent need to address shortfalls in a system that is failing its constituency.

I will continue to work with my independent colleagues, including the honourable member for Northern Tablelands, to obtain better health outcomes for country people. I note the support of the Parliamentary Secretary at the table, the honourable member for Canterbury. She lives in an inner-city electorate and quite possibly does not experience the challenges that people in country areas face on a daily basis. This situation is of great concern to people who choose to live outside metropolitan areas. I would appreciate the support of the Government in helping to address it.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY** (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.02 p.m.]: I will take forward the issues the honourable member for Tamworth has raised. Members on this side of the House from country regions often raise the same concerns. Dental services are urgent. I undertake to take those two issues forward.

### CURRAWONG

**Mr ALEX McTAGGART** (Pittwater) [6.03 p.m.]: Today I outline clearly both my position and Pittwater Council's position on the proposed sale of the Unions New South Wales property known as Currawong, which is located in Pittwater. Currawong is on the upper western foreshores of Pittwater near the mouth of the Hawkesbury River. It comprises 23 hectares of beachfront and bushland containing Aboriginal sites and rare native fauna and flora. It adjoins Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park on three sides and it is accessible by water only. The flat area of the site, which is approximately four hectares, is zoned residential 2 (a) under Pittwater's 1993 local environmental plan [LEP]. It contains eight 1940s style fibro cottages, the heritage listed Midholme, which is used for administration, and a conference centre. It is operated by Unions New South Wales as a holiday site for trade union members. The site is owned by Unions New South Wales, formerly the Labor Council of New South Wales.

The site was purchased in 1949 for £10,000 from the Port Jackson Manly Steamship Company. In the mid-1990s the then Labor Council Secretary, Michael Costa, announced plans to sell Currawong. However, a union ruling—rule 44, which was brought in under Jack Lang—prevented the sale. In March 2001 rule 44 was amended so that the sale of Currawong and several other Labor Council assets could proceed. In 2005 the new Unions New South Wales Secretary, John Robertson, announced that Currawong would be sold. After some internal machinations the union movement approved the sale, with the proceeds reportedly to be spent on fighting the Federal Government's workplace relations reforms. Currawong is on the open market.

Since the sale was first mooted in the mid-1990s a spirited campaign to have Currawong retained in its current use or transferred to public ownership has been undertaken by the Friends of Currawong, an action group made up of Pittwater residents, environmentalists and trade union members from across the State. In response to community concerns Pittwater Council has consistently taken the line that this site should be maintained for public benefit and not cut up for development. A number of reports to council that have been made in open session clearly set out the position of Pittwater Council. The most recent are dated 1 May 2006 and 24 April 2006, and they can be viewed on council's website at [pittwaterlga.com.au](http://pittwaterlga.com.au). On a number of occasions Pittwater Council has attempted to have elements of the Currawong site heritage listed. Two applications were forwarded to the State Government, one in 1999 and one 2003. The 2005 draft LEP for heritage conservation is currently with Parliamentary Counsel. The council and community are still waiting for the Government to make the gazettal and to heritage list Currawong.

Although heritage listing will not prevent the sale or the redevelopment of the site, it would limit the options available to a developer. Council has been called on to rezone the usable residential area, but this has been rejected as a council-initiated rezoning would require compensation to the landowner and Pittwater Council is not in a financial position to either purchase the site or pay compensation for rezoning. A number of potential purchasers have approached both council and me for advice as to what council would accept in the

way of redevelopment. I have refused to discuss redevelopment potential. I have advised them to seek owner's consent and lodge a development application with Pittwater Council in the normal course of business. However, I have provided a list of the constraints that I consider as limiting factors for any redevelopment and prudent for purchasers to consider.

They are, not necessarily in order of difficulty, current zonings, waterway zone along the foreshore, acquisition responsibility of State Government under Cumberland County zonings, council's resolution to seek public ownership, potential European heritage listing, potential Aboriginal heritage issues, creek line riparian issues and flooding, tidal wave inundation, bushfire hazards, geotechnical hazards, potential filled site and the stability and contamination of those areas, mainland parking and infrastructure impacts, the Department of Lands potential to close Church Point and Pittwater Park car parking, existing use rights legislation, longstanding prohibited subdivision of western foreshores, and the implications of Pittwater 21 LEP.

On 13 November 2005, in response to community concern, Pittwater Council offered a co-operative partnership between council and the State Government to jointly acquire and manage the Currawong property for the public benefit, noting that the State Government had made an offer of \$10.8 million in the expressions of interest, an offer it subsequently withdrew two weeks after the closing date. As at today's date, there is no formal application before Pittwater Council for any form of redevelopment of the Currawong site, and the State Government has still not made the heritage LEP, which includes the Currawong site. I would welcome any initiative that puts Currawong in public ownership for the benefit of the people of New South Wales.

**Private members' statements noted.**

**The House adjourned at 6.08 p.m. until Tuesday 5 September 2006 at 2.15 p.m.**

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